

spare Rib

a women's liberation magazine
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Inside this issue...

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are
you
nut
plant
or
bird?

TURN TO
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Letters

Is this the first time you've seen Spare Rib?

Write and tell us what you think.

Spare Rib, 27 Clerkenwell Close,
London EC1R 0AT.



Anti-men? Who-me?

Dear Spare Rib

When I read the letter 'Anti-men' in SR73, I thought it was she, Linda, who should look to the past, and see how it has changed for us women, for the *better!* The women's movement is the great universal need, it is the bridge we must cross to meet our sisters and unite, and that we *shall do*. The friendship of *Spare Rib* is the foundation of our progress.

As to the anti-men question, some are, and some are not. What I say is, 'Women may have their faults, men have only two. Everything they say, and everything they do.'

Keep on trucking, Spare Rib!
Best wishes,
Jean Allman,
Leeds, Yorkshire.

Mixed Reaction

*Dear Spare Rib,

I've just read my first copy of *Spare Rib*, which was a stimulating mixture of inspiration and disgust provoking garbage – nice one. Letters, especially. To publish a letter from a 'Working Class Woman' which states that only women who reject child-bearing and take an active part politically, economically and socially in the community will change anything, is arrant sexism, 1970's style.

I bought *Spare Rib* for its issue on sexism in education. My daughter has started infants school, and after one week the effects are apparent. How do I counteract the rampant sexism of the infant classroom? With bigger kids, the way is clearer, but with four year olds the indoctrination is subtle, and there is no way the child can have any defences against it.

Point of fact. Nursery education was pioneered by Rachel and Margaret MacMillan in the slums of Deptford (see SR 75 'Nursery Nurses Changing Course'). And although many nursery nurses may be "mainly concerned with first aid and toileting", personally

I have never been in a nursery school where this was mainly so. Nursery teachers, and I am one, change wet pants as much, if not more, than the assistants.

Just small points. I might buy *Spare Rib* again, but I'll have to read this one a few more times first. By the way, does anyone know of a non-sexist French course? The only ones we have found are worse than reading schemes.

Love,
Fizz,
South Croydon.

Lesbian Link

*Dear Spare Rib

Thanks for our debut article in your profile of lesbian groups (SR74).

We would like to correct an impression that may have been given by the statement, 'the group is a mixture of women who see themselves as political and those who don't'. *All* the women in the group have a political perspective upon their lesbianism. The difference of emphasis lies in how strongly each of us relates that perspective when providing the service to the women we are reaching out to. The tension between the political, the social, and the emotional will always exist in a group as diverse as ours, but it can prove itself a dynamic, not a destructive tension.

At the moment we're putting together our information files for when the phone-line opens at the end of the year. We want these to be as comprehensive as possible, not just focusing on the North West, so we would like any *SR* readers to send relevant details to us. We would, of course, respect confidentiality whenever requested.

In sisterhood,
Lesbian Link Collective,
Manchester Gay Information Center,
178 Oxford Road,
Manchester M13 9QQ.
tel: 061-263 3725

Contraceptive Injections

Dear Spare Rib,

Can any of your readers help me with information on injected, long-term contraceptives, in particular 'Depo-Provera'?

I went to a previously sympathetic female doctor to enquire about sterilisation. The extent of her 'liberal and progressive' sympathy was revealed by such statements as "having children is THE purpose of a woman's life", "you WILL change your mind when you're older" etc. (I'm 23). As I explained my reasons and objections to what I thought were the only available contraceptive methods, she let slip, purely to counter my argument rather than generously to inform, the existence of a three-monthly contraceptive injection. I saw a female doctor at the local gynaecology dept., who prescribed such an injection, to be administered by a third local G.P.

When I collected the drug from the chemist, almost incidentally I read through the instruction leaflet which accompanied it. This included such gems as "a direct tumour stimulating effect", "difficult to predict . . .", "awaits further study", "possibility of adrenal suppression", culminating in: "This product has not been approved for long term use as a contraceptive."

The doctor who was to inject me with this stuff admitted he knew less about this treatment than I did, but smugly insinuated that the pill had gone through such an experimental period, and saw no parallel with thalidomide! When I said that if I could not be given assurances as to the safety of the drug (Depo-Provera medroxyprogesterone acetate), then I wanted to be sterilised, we launched into a lengthy and heated argument about professional ethics, the line between a patient's decision and a doctor's. And, of course, the standard lecture on the value and strength of marriage and family life.

He has referred me back to the hospital, but could not recommend sterilisation. He admitted this was a personal opinion founded on 'moral' rather than medical objections and that the only way I could fulfil my decision was to find, through a process of elimination, a doctor whose moral values coincided with my own! I couldn't help remarking that if I had conformed, i.e. married the man I have lived with for three years, produced a child neither of us wanted, had it adopted, or battered it, I would have little difficulty in getting sterilised – he agreed! The only proof, it seems, I can offer that I am to be taken seriously is to return aged 65 and childless.

I would be grateful to hear from any women who have experience with Depo-Provera or any other contraceptive injection. Meanwhile the struggle goes on...

Yours in sisterhood
(but *not* motherhood),
Katrina Wright
Aberdeen
(Write to Katrina c/o Spare Rib)

Heckling and . . .

Dear Spare Rib,

I knew that some day someone was going to make a derisive comment about the name of the magazine.

So yesterday I was at Victoria Station and went into Smith's bookshop to enquire about buying *Spare Rib*. The man who has some superior position there made a physical lunge in the direction of my 'spare rib', and muttered something about needing another one – ha ha. He continued this heckling all through the process of looking for the magazine. In the end I found it myself.

But I was angry and I'm getting really tired of being angry. I know it's supposed to be liberating to feel and release anger but there are so many insults that women endure every day, how can we physically afford that much anger? Surely the adrenals are going to explode under the pressure. I just wish I lived on another planet most of the time.
Yours in sisterhood,
Cindy Harnist,
Brighton, Sussex

. . . Goading

* Dear Spare Rib,

On Saturday September 2, a group of women, five of us in all, visited Birmingham from Coventry for the day, mainly to go to see a Patti Smith performance.

Late in the afternoon we went for a drink in a pub near the theatre. Whilst we were at the bar an arrogant man questioned us about the badges we were wearing, ranging from anti-fascist to outright gay ones. We felt that he knew what they stood for, and that this was deliberate provocation, as we had seen him heckling earlier in the day at an anti racist rally. So we chose to ignore his questions, and settled down nicely around a table.

We were talking amongst ourselves when he again approached us, and demanded to know what our badges meant, pointing directly at the feminist ones. First we told him they were to do with the 'Tom and Jerry' fan club – but he had no humour, and we were losing patience. So when he asked again we told him they stood for unity amongst women and that's what we were doing, so would he please fuck off.

Later he reappeared, to say very quietly, "You pint drinking lesbians!" Our immediate reaction was to laugh, but then as that statement was partly true, and as we were not ashamed, we wondered why he found it necessary to whisper. We asked him to repeat his statement louder, but he did so only quietly. He was

embarrassed, though he had meant to embarrass us. So we shouted, "Yes, we are pint drinking lesbians!" Now as the pub was small and quite crowded, everyone turned and looked at us and him. He was quite astounded that we women weren't afraid, and were prepared to fight back. We could see how hideous he felt, and in a desperate attempt to save his pigheaded pride he told us that NF members frequented the pub and would smash us up. We told him mockingly that we were really scared, and at this he left us.

Because of this incident we are thinking of producing a badge which says, "I am a pint drinking lesbian". We in Coventry would really like to hear what other women think, as we are very keen on the idea.

We look forward to any correspondence about it.
Yours in sisterhood,
Mary, Jane, Miranda, Jill, Tracy,
Fiona, Suzanne, Anne, Rose,
Coventry, W Midlands.
(Write to them c/o *Spare Rib*)

Unsuitable = Unprofitable

*Dear *Spare Rib*,
A fragmentary answer to the question, "Where is the Movement's Literature?"—we all know where it is—consigned to the realms of oblivion, owing to (1) profit motives acting as an effective form of censorship, and (2) the fact that British publishers are noted for their faint-heartedness when challenged by the articulate spokesmen, or more often spokeswoman, of countervailing cultures.

I am convinced that there is no paucity of talent among women in the WLM—rather that their endeavours are being blocked and frustrated at every twist and turn of the maze. If women are not given an initial hearing, it is small wonder we don't hear their voices. I know I've got a manuscript tucked away, a full length novel, with real live LESBIANS as the major protagonists. The publishing world, predictably, doesn't want to know: 'We fear it would be unsuitable for our lists'. Ahem. The message is quite clear. We mustn't flutter the dove-cotes, girls.

We should surely be encountering an abundance of adventurous and imaginative fiction—a reflection of the lives of literally thousands of women, whose activities centre around other women and whose contacts with men are only marginal. I am referring to all those gay (and straight) women who find Erica Jong's mentality quite incomprehensible—her heroines veer between being sex objects and sex subjects, and never have meaningful contacts or interchange with other women.

From a literary standpoint, female readers are perishing of

malnutrition. The women portrayed in contemporary books are for the most part women we cannot and do not want to identify with. People may well drink ersatz coffee, if there is no alternative, but that doesn't mean to say they wouldn't rather have the real thing.
Yours,
J. Knuckles,
Bristol.

Heterosexists Against the Nazis

Dear *Spare Rib*,
At Brighton on 3rd September, in all good faith, I went with some friends to support an Anti-Nazi League benefit.

We came away sickened and disgusted by the anti-woman, anti-gay attitudes of some of these so-called anti-fascists. The word 'poofster' was bandied about in a jeering manner. Women were insulted by chants of, 'Tits against fascism, women against the wall', etc etc and this from men we had turned out to support.

When we protested we were told to 'piss off', so we did, vowing Never Again.
Yours in sisterhood,
Valerie Lowe
Croydon, Surrey.

Transform, not Reform

*Dear *Spare Rib*,
Thank you for the Forum article in *SR74* in which the ideas and successes behind the Seven Demands of the Women's Movement were called into question.

I feel this questioning was timely and essential. Although I would deny that the demands and their albeit limited fulfilment were useless, I feel that a set of demands focuses our energies on too narrow a set of objectives and dupe some into thinking that when we have achieved them, all will be well. Also it deflects many from the more urgent issue of transforming attitudes towards women, and women's role in current society. Perhaps worst of all, I feel that a side effect of pursuing the demands has been to demoralise many within the Women's Movement, leaving them with a lower opinion of themselves than if certain laws had not been passed.

Why do I say this? Given that we have the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts, there is nothing on the face of it to stop women, like men, deciding what they want and going out to get it. I know that the pathway to my chosen career and lifestyle has been legislatively cleared of some of the more impassable debris, and indeed here and there some women have 'made it'. But these reforms are far from total, and have provided critics with new weapons: 'Whose fault is it now but your own?' Based on half truths as they are, these attacks

are hard to defend oneself against, and throw me back on excessive self-criticisms and doubtings.

Laws may have changed, but attitudes and conditioning of generations have not. In our present society women cannot win. We have only one of two choices: being 'female' or being fulfilled, and we face the possibility of being mutilated whichever choice we make.

As long, then, as we have legislation strengthened to 'allow' women equality, at the same time as narrow, artificially constructed stereotypes of what women can be and do, advance will be slow. Women often cannot make use of reforms until we are viewed, like men, as rounded human beings, capable of being both a member of our own sex and human. Only when this happens will I and many others find the strength and confidence to grow.

In sisterhood,
C. Hanly,
Leeds, W. Yorkshire.

Timely

*Dear *Spare Rib*,
Really glad you have done this issue (*SR 75 Back to School*) just when you have as I am about to teach a women's studies course in rural West Somerset. I hope to include some teenagers from local Coffee Bar project for unemployed young people. All this under the auspices of Bristol University—may be the times really are a-changing though most of the time, in spite of *Spare Rib* I have my doubts.

We liked the poster a lot—so often 'message' posters are really bad visually. Are you issuing extra copies, because I'd like to keep one and spread it around a bit.

Thanks a lot, as always,
All the best,
Elaine,
West Somerset.

We're thinking about reprinting the poster, and we'll announce it if we do.

Enjoyable Work

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I am a stripper and a feminist. I was surprised at the attitude of the Shetland Women's Group (*SR 74*). I fail to see how striptease encourages rape.

I also happen to enjoy my work, and resent other sisters trying to deprive me of a job. Or perhaps I should get a job at the censor board?
Janet Feindel,
London SW12

Unenjoyable Work

*Dear *Spare Rib*,
I felt I had to write in reply to three of your articles in *SR 74* which I closely related to. Here's my definition of why 'Art' is in the state it is!

I myself am an art student, and find it increasingly difficult to justify my own experience at college. The college tutors are mostly male, claim to judge students work 'objectively', but always view the work of female students from a male sexist standpoint. The whole definition of what art should be is dictated in art colleges by the governors—and who do you think they are?

It seems that art colleges are places where one is taught to recognise 'faces' and 'names', and to justify whatever one pleases—so long as it adheres to the myth that the artist is a male and a genius.

I badly need a reason to complete the remaining two years of my BA... or am I just a hypocrite?
In sisterhood,
Pauline Jones,
Cheltenham, Glos.

We're Here

Dear *Spare Rib*,
Here is a letter to all the people of the North East—we sell *Spare Rib*—on time, and consistently, and we'll put a copy under the counter for you if you'd like to order it.

While Irene Smith of Billingham, Cleveland, (*SR 75*), was trotting back and forth to W.H.S., we were just up the stairs on the balcony of Spencer Hall Market with copies of *Spare Rib* on the counter. We are an alternative bookshop, and sell, amongst many other subjects, works on feminism and sexual politics.
Peace,
Jacquie,
'Green', Balcony Shops,
Spencer Hall Market,
High Street,
Stockton-on-Tees,
Cleveland.

* Indicates letters have been cut

help!

We now have to wrap and mail out all 4,000-odd subscription copies ourselves, from our office. We desperately need help because it takes ages! We can't afford to pay you for your time, but we all do the work together and it can be quite a laugh. It happens once a month, usually on the third Monday and some of the Tuesday as well—unless we get a LOT of volunteers. If you can help, ring or write to Jill at *Spare Rib*.

Daily Express 19 Sept

If Sally Shave, who is responsible for little children, does not mind their growing up neither men nor women, the sooner she turns her talents to working a capstan lathe or a manicurist's scissors, the better.

Evening News 22 Sept

Parents can't help smiling fondly when they watch their small daughter taking half an hour to decide which half-digan goes best with the dress she is planning to wear tomorrow; or their small son putting on the muddy, torn trousers he took off the night before because "they're my comfortable ones."

You have only to think how worried you'd be if it were the other way round, to realise what pernicious rubbish Miss Shave is talking. And to wonder why Hertfordshire education authorities allow her to practise her half-baked theories.

Sunday Express 24 Sept

THOSE teachers who, as reported last week, are trying to blur the distinction between boys and girls have a lot to learn.

The trouble with so many fanatical reformers like these non-sexist nuts is that they throw out the baby with the bath water, and in their fervour to sweep away everything that is bad about discrimination, they sweep away everything that is good too.

Equal opportunity is one thing because it offers choice: Being bulldozed into total sameness is quite another. If the non-sexist lot had their way girls would be made to feel inadequate if they follow their age-old instincts to attract a mate, set up home, have babies and devote their life to looking after all three. This is not imposed on the female sex. It is as natural in girls as in a plant or a robin.

We say Sally is OK



Our last issue (Back to School) got a lot of publicity. Most of it was very favourable, but two papers, the *Daily Express* and the *Evening News*, really went to town, choosing as their target Sally Shave, whose ten ideas on how to counter sexism in a junior school seemed to rouse them into a perfect fury. Here is the story of what happened to Sally, once the news broke in the village where she works.



The first Sally knew about it all was the arrival of an irate parent at the school, brandishing the *Daily Express* and demanding explanations. He said she was turning his daughter into an atheist, and what's more he'd always known there was something funny about Sally, because she rode a man's bike. Before long, both the head and the chairman of the governors, (the vicar), had decided to call a governors' meeting, so that Sally, who is deputy head, could give a 'full explanation'. It was the seventh of her ideas which, not unexpectedly, caused most of the trouble: "In sewing and cookery which the boys do I always oppose suggestions that the boys will grow up homosexual (by parents or children) by asking why this would be such a bad thing anyway." So at the meeting, great emphasis was placed on this. "I was asked to agree that homosexuals were sub-normal, and I remember that acts of gross indecency came into it somewhere." She tried, without success, to point out the links between sexism and racism – but the two governors particularly opposed to her could see no parallel. Other ideas were also then attacked: commenting upon her own clothing,

it was pointed out to her that if young children were encouraged to wear jeans, they'd grow up to be wayward scruffs. And, later she was told that encouraging girls to lift things would result in them "displacing their parts".

However, these attacks were evidently coming from a very small group – only two of the governors held these views. And one set of parents (the man's bike pair) began a petition for Sally's dismissal. Other parents not only ignored this, but sent messages of support to Sally, saying, "If she comes knocking on my door with something to sign, I'll tell her where to stick it!" Parents also wrote to the school, saying that if the harassment didn't stop, they'd remove their children. Meanwhile, all her colleagues, including the sorely tried head, supported both her right to publish, and the basic ideas she'd put forward. Hertfordshire Education Authority even said, "It's only what has been county policy for 25 years". (Surprising news, eh?)

While the worst pressure was on Sally, the *Evening News* published an extraordinary (even for them) piece, virtually inciting Hertford-

shire to sack her, and going on at length about how charming clean little girls and dirty boys are. Angela Ince, who wrote it, provoked no noticeable response, despite her threat that she would move house if her children were in Sally's catchment area.

Sally feels that the whole episode has been used in the village by the very few people who have been dying to have a go at the school's general teaching approaches – "Children are allowed to talk to each other, to move about, and to call teachers by their first names." It puzzled all of us that the press had picked on this particular article, when in fact it isn't as radical or provocative as others in the issue. Sally says, "It's because it's so easy to lift, it's potted, and simply presented." And we also thought it might be because it doesn't just describe the miseries of school sexism – it says what action teachers can and are taking. Obviously the actions of feminist teachers are still very threatening, especially when they raise the issue of homosexuality.

A few days later the local paper, the *Hertfordshire Mercury*, ran a front page story with a huge headline,

"Spare Rib Protest". (They had previously been sent a warning letter from Sally's solicitor concerning any attacks they might be thinking of making on her.) This seemed comparatively reasonable in tone, quoting the head saying that Sally's boys were not turning out to be cissies because they kept winning football matches. (No news about the girls though. . .) It ended with the name and address of the hapless parent still trying to get names on the petition to have her sacked.

Sally has really been put through it. She's received messages of support from *SR* readers who've been ringing in to see what they could do, from "NUT Women" and various NUT branches. That, and the support she has had from her colleagues, parents, and sympathetic governors, has helped to offset the unpleasantness caused by the goadings of the right-wing press. "I was taken by surprise at the depth of the bigotry it opened up. I think it's really important to confront that – and I haven't any regrets. But of course, I suspect that my promotion prospects in the county are now virtually nil." ●

Susan Hemmings

home not so sweet home

All European countries employ and are dependent on migrant labour. The Portuguese and Moroccans tend to go to France, Turks and Italians to Germany, Greeks to Sweden, Filipinos, Irish and Spanish to the UK. They are used to fill labour shortages in the worst and most unpleasant jobs. The 1978 Department of Employment (DoE) figure for new permits and permissions is 13,000. About 20% of these are for domestic and catering work.

When *Rachel Langton* returned from Canada, after a bad experience as a domestic worker there (SR 63) she decided to investigate the plight of foreign domestics and au pairs in Britain. In this article she talks about their life here, and also exposes the unscrupulous workings of employment agencies, the inadequate protection the law provides, and the unions' lack of interest.

Traditionally men of the third world and non-industrial countries were the ones forced to find work far afield to support their families. It is only more recently that women have been uprooted and separated from their families to find the means of survival.

Foreign women cannot get permits to work in Britain if their children are under 18, and some get really desperate. If they do come over concealing the age of their children, they then cannot claim even the meagre tax allowance. Furthermore, while a man on a work permit can be joined by his wife and children under 18, provided he can support them 'to the satisfaction of the authorities', no woman on a work permit can bring over any member of her family. But if, after four years here on a permit, migrant women do decide to apply for resident status, they must

then prove they have been supporting their offspring financially

Except for au pairs, anyone from outside the EEC who wants work in Britain needs a work permit. These are regulated by the DoE and indicate the particular industry within which the worker has to remain. Although they include hours and pay, they are in no way contracts, as some believe. All people on work permits or who have permission to stay longer than three months must in addition register with the police and must have a 'green book' which states conditions of stay, changes of address and employment.

All this puts migrant workers in a vulnerable and easily exploitable situation, as it is also up to the employers to apply for renewal of work permits. The DoE though claim that there is "no evidence in the last 18 months of abuse". But they admit that the small number of complaints from employees could well be due to the danger of dismissal, over which the DoE have no control, although they will investigate cases brought to their attention.

The work permit system is definitely open to abuse. Migrant workers are effectively tied to one particular job, with a specific employer, for although they are allowed to do any kind of domestic work (if this is the area for which the permit was issued), they must have the DoE's permission to change jobs. This is often difficult, especially as a reference is needed for a new job. So bad conditions are constantly re-inforced. One woman who had stood up for herself and left her job as a household worker had found herself domestic work in a hospital. But, after consultation with her former employer, the DoE denied her the job on 'technical grounds'. Usually the DoE is so slow in considering applications to change jobs that lack of money forces women to start work. This is technically illegal, even though their application may later be granted.

Renewal of the permit brings additional difficulties, for it's often only granted if they promise to remain a further year with the same family. Even if an employer has, through ignorance or carelessness, failed to apply for a

permit or to get it renewed, it is the migrant who is in breach of the law. So far, when workers have appealed against the threat of deportation they haven't been successful. Even when a migrant applies for permanent residence status she is dependent on the goodwill of the employer. Again, if a migrant has had to conceal the ages of her children or had to lie about her professional qualifications in order to obtain a permit, she is open to threats from her employers, so she has to keep quiet about bad conditions.

The particular brutality of the migrant labour system is that the state does its best to prevent or discourage the worker from settling. In Britain, work permits must be renewed each year. Migrants have no political rights — it is hazardous to join a union, nor can they vote in any elections. Family life is restricted. Discrimination is inherent in the regulations governing rights to council housing, benefits, tax allowances, health and social services, and in the lack of language classes.

money makes the world go round...

The advantages to capital of a mobile and unorganised labour force are obvious. And the system which creates the need for migrant labour in this country also creates the underdevelopment in third world countries. After being deprived of their land by colonisation, people came to the cities, unable to make a living on the land, but couldn't and still cannot find any work there either. In Columbia, for example, unemployment in the seven largest cities is at least 12% of the potential work force, plus a further underemployment of 10%. Real wages (buying power) of urban workers have been cut in the last three years by 22%, while prices have doubled. In the Philippines, unemployment is at 7% in urban areas and 2.5 million are underemployed. Since the 1965 take-over when Marcos became president, living standards have steadily worsened. Real wages (1965 as base line) have declined for skilled workers by 38% and for unskilled workers by 29% (Central Bank statistics). The last rise in the minimum wage was followed three days later by the doubling of the price of rice.

The usual policy of governments of non-industrial countries is to attract multinational investments by allowing the companies to take unlimited profits out of the country. This leaves those countries bereft of

resources, because profits are not ploughed back into indigenous production nor into developing new industry.

When migrants do return home, they face the same economic stagnation — either they or the next member of the family will have to go abroad again to work. For the country which exports its labour, there are two advantages — discontent over unemployment is defused and foreign currency is brought in. These regimes are often very keen to have foreign currency coming into the country. An example of this was the work contract issued by the Philippine government. This contract binds the employer "to assist the worker in making remittances from his/her salary to his/her own bank account in the Philippines in the amount of at least 30% of his/her salary". The sum could be over £100,000 a week from Britain alone. This helps to explain the Philippine Embassy's concern that its nationals remain here and best of all in the same job, however bad the conditions. The same contract attempts to provide for fair wages, hours and benefits, but is often ineffectual, since such conditions cannot be enforced in this country.

au pairs - a unique status

Before the first world war it was people born in Britain who went into domestic work, but with the expansion of heavy industry more and more factories needed workers. At the same time labour saving devices were cutting down the need for large household staffs. But during the recent post war expansion, more middle class women started to go out to work and with little development of childcare facilities the need for domestic workers increased again. Foreign women (particularly Filipinas) began to fill the gaps. But again, with rising unemployment, the state tried to cut back on the number of foreign workers.

Of foreign domestic workers, au pairs are often not recognised as one of the most exploited groups. Today there are some 25,000 in Britain. They come over on a 'cultural' basis, but frequently end up being used as cheap labour. Some women even agree to not being paid at all..... Au pair status is unique to Europe. A Home Office leaflet which is supposed to be given to them and their employers states that they come "primarily to learn English and live as a member of an English family". They are to receive "pocket

money and undertake light housework and childcare on a partnership basis". They have no legal protection or contract and are entirely dependent upon these Home Office recommendations. Over half of those who entered the country in 1977 as au pairs did not receive the leaflet, nor of course, do any of the women who come in as students or tourists and end up working as au pairs as their only way of staying here. Some worked a 60 hour week, and just over half worked over the 30 hours recommended by the Home Office guidelines. The average pay was £8 a week. Many had no completely free day, had insufficient time and opportunity for studying the language, did heavy housework and were left with sole responsibility for children, who may be difficult or at least have a very different cultural background. Not surprising over a quarter changed families according to the LUCS survey (Dec. 1977), commissioned by the International Youth Welfare Committee.

Au pairs need support to form their own organisation and to fight for basic rights. But the system is, above all, an anachronism which reflects British cultural imperialism. There is, therefore, a need to separate the educational aspect (learning English) from the labour side. In reality the term 'au pair' is coming to be used as a euphemism for part-time foreign workers without work permits.

But conditions of work are as bad for domestic workers on work permits. The hours are as long, with no overtime pay. Live-in pay is on average £18 a week. As well as doing all the housework and childcare, they can be asked to do gardening, decorating and also may not have a completely free day and suffer the insecurity of not having their own homes.

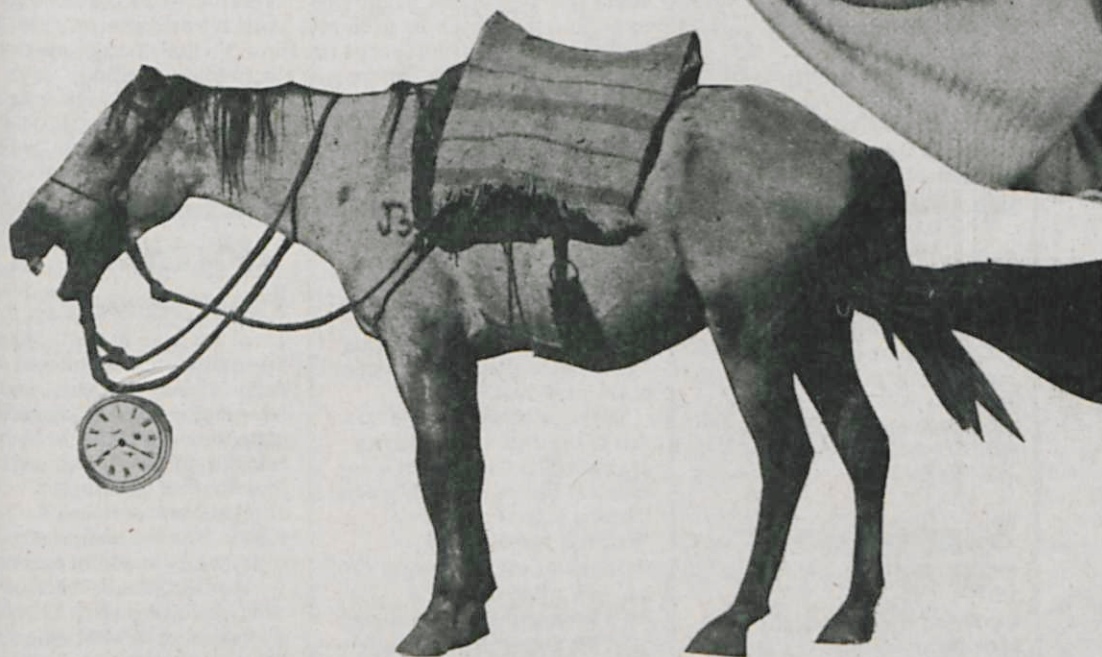
But it is all too easy to condemn anyone who employs an au pair or domestic with more women going out to work and no socialised childcare or housework, there sometimes is no alternative.

agencies rip-off

Employment agencies in Britain thrive on the needs of the household worker and the employer. Recently a charity was charged £400 for three Filipino office workers who anyway turned out not to have correct work permits. The agencies are licensed by the Secretary of State and those who break the Employment Agencies Act are, in theory, prevented from continuing. However, the maximum fine for infringement of the regulations is only £400; there are not enough



The children
simply adore
her —
She's just like
one of the
family —



inspectors for the approximately 6,000 agencies, and they have insufficient experience of their ruses anyway. Revocation or refusal to grant a licence seems to be used only as a last resort. Besides this, illegal agencies still do operate — two Filipina nurses run a 'successful' unregistered domestic agency in London, charging high fees to employers and employees.

Au pairs are not supposed to be charged by agencies at all. However, 12% of au pairs did pay a fee to a British agent (LUCS survey). Agents get round the law by making payment of 'service fee' conditional on getting a position. By law, agents are not to charge both the employer and employee. It seems British agents do abide by this and usually only charge the employer.

However, some agents have their own contacts abroad who do charge the employee.

The Employment Agencies Act states that "full details of the work and the employee's background are supposed to be given" but it is quite usual to hear that pay and hours turn out not to be the same as those arranged by the agency. Many people are paid just when and how much it suits the employer and are often ignorant about National Insurance contributions, medical care and legal aid. Common complaints from domestic workers are about their small, cold rooms and lack of food.

In general, the agencies take few pains to match up suitable employees and employers. As one woman told me, an agency sent her newly-arrived friend

to the very same family which she had just left the week before because of maltreatment. Although this was not illegal, obviously the agency's primary concern was not to lose the fee paid by the employer.

A regulation which is often broken is the one on repayment of fares. Agents are not supposed to arrange employment if the worker will have to repay the money advanced for her fare at a rate of more than one eighth of her weekly pay, or if the total exceeds three weeks pay (the second applies to au pairs only). Many domestic workers come from the Philippines and the Philippine government has a work contract (which both employer and employee must sign) under which the employer

CONTINUED ON PAGE 39

Self defence not murder

A grand jury indictment for first degree manslaughter against a woman who stabbed her husband to stop him battering her and the children has been dismissed by a Supreme Court judge in Brooklyn, New York.

Justice Hellenbrand said important evidence had been withheld from the grand jury by the District Attorney. Agnes Scott had been beaten by her husband for years but the jury weren't told of this and Ms Scott was not allowed to testify about her motives and circumstances.

She and the two children had been in hiding from Mr Scott for seven years. Before that she'd been forced to move several times to escape his beatings. Just last October the Criminal Court had ordered him to stay away from her. But on March 30 he found her, went for her with his belt and was dragging the children into the bedroom when she stabbed him in the shoulder. While waiting for the ambulance she'd called, he bled to death.

Hellenbrand said the District Attorney had failed to inform the grand jury about the "law of justification" which defines the degree of physical force permissible in self-defence. Agnes Scott's supporters see this dismissal as an important precedent, though the District Attorney intends to appeal. Ms Scott is now free on bail.

Women's right to defend themselves against male violence has become a big issue in the USA, particularly with the famous cases of Joanne Little and Inez Garcia who killed men they claimed had raped or tried to rape them. Now more cases of battered women killing in desperation make the news. The question is always whether it was premeditated ("The laws governing self-defence say the person must be in 'imminent danger'. But battered women are in imminent danger all the time," says a member of the defence committee for Francine Hughes, acquitted for killing her husband after 13 years of beatings) and whether it was really a last resort - couldn't she have called the police or left the man? But the police don't take battering too seriously and there are immense economic and psychological pressures on women to hang on to a marriage.

In the Women's Correctional Center in Chicago in 1977, of 132 women inside for murder or manslaughter, 53 had killed husbands



TONI TYE WALKER

American Katie Duck (left) at the second "Vrouwenfestival" in Amsterdam in September. She's doing what Toni Tye Walker, who took the photos, called "a mime with weird noises" - "She went through all women's roles from the egg being fertilised female to hatching and flying the nest."

A couple of thousand women and a few men at the beginning and end went to the five-day festival at the "Melkweg", a converted milk factory now used as a women's arts centre. A lot of Dutch and German women were there but few British, except for those invited to take part - Ova, Gay Sweatshop, Terry Quaye with her drums. . . "There was a very loving feeling," says Toni, "it really built up by the end and felt so complete. It's the first thing like it I've ever been to." This festival of women's art, music, play was aimed, say the organisers, not at "a specific group of women but all of you, with the possible exception of those who feel that no changes are necessary either in our society or our consciousness." They hope to hold another next year.



TONI TYE WALKER

or boyfriends who had repeatedly beaten them. All these women said they'd called the police five or six times; 27 said that if the police did make arrests, the beatings only got worse afterwards. O

The Agnes Scott Defense Committee is at C4900, Brooklyn, New York 11202.

Support for Dalila

Canadian women's groups are planning an International Day of Solidarity on October 28 for the liberation of Dalila Maschino, the Algerian woman who was seized from Canada and held captive in an Algerian village, forced to marry a man of her brother's choice (SR 74). That day they want people to demonstrate in front of the Algerian embassy in their own countries: "In this way we will have a massive show of strength on her behalf and a powerful demonstration against violence against women." O
Contact the Committee for the Liberation of Dalila, 1255 Carre Phillips No. 401, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Libelling on

Remember 'Babies For Burning', the horror story about abortion which attracted a shower of libel writs, named non-existent 'wicked' doctors, and faked a pregnancy

test trial? The book has recently emerged in a French edition and is selling well in France, Belgium and Canada, complete with all the admitted lies and distortions that the authors had promised, in court, to correct.

In fact, a note at the end says that the authors were acquitted of two legal actions, which is not true, and that enquiries following the legal actions established "precisely the same state of affairs as set out in *Bebes Au Feu*."

INCEST INQUIRY

An inquiry into how many children are sexually assaulted within the family is to be launched by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. After hearing evidence of how widespread incest is in America, the NSPCC felt more needed to be known about the situation here.

Only 295 cases were reported in Britain last year; 129 men were convicted and 97 sentenced to prison. But as a Home Office spokesperson said, "It is not the sort of offence that comes to light very often". We asked the NSPCC how they hoped to get below the surface - they mentioned only sending a questionnaire round their seven Battered Child Treatment Units, and assured us that the survey hadn't yet started, would take ages and that results might never be published. Great. O

'Normal' housework

There was panic at the DHSS on September 8 when a tribunal of national insurance commissioners ruled that the phrase "incapable of performing her normal household duties" should be interpreted broadly when deciding if a disabled married woman is eligible for a housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension.

The DHSS insists that married women should get HNCIP only if they are incapable of housework "to a substantial extent". Why all the fuss? Because the tribunal's ruling would, says the DHSS, enormously increase the amount paid out in HNCIP - now £23 million a year. So they're taking rapid steps to reverse it. O

Group minding

Wandsworth Childminders Association has been allocated £62,000 in Urban Aid for a new self-help scheme. The association, composed of childminders, plans to employ 20 minders to care for two to three children each, keep a diary on how they work, a register of attendance and go to weekly group meetings. It will offer all the necessary equipment and a coordinator to provide an "in-service advice course", seeing this as a step on the way to improving the status and working conditions of childminders. O

Later on two thirds of women say they intend to go out to work when married, over half feel underpaid and over half of those with children say they get an unequal deal. *Honey* comments: "Which they probably do. And from an employer's point of view that is probably justified. Women with children become, with the best will in the world, a notoriously unreliable workforce; given the normal run of childish ailments and school holidays and not given an ace nanny, it is hard to see how they can possibly function 100%." Well, you could try crying for creches, etc - and for shorter working hours so no-one *had* to "function 100%" of their time in an office. And an office is where most *Honey* women apparently

Jill Nicholls

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The Agony Column

your problem, it will probably collide with honesty. After all, if there is a solution, you and your husband will have to find it together, and at the moment you are not even agreed about the problem; he thinks

JACKY FLEMING

**Newshorts by Jill Nicholls and
Angela Phillips**

SCOTTISH SHIRT STRIKE

Banner Shirts are not cheap. They are made well and sold in Tesco's, Littlewoods, and the House of Frazer. They are bought by the government for the army, airforce and police.

One might assume therefore that their clothing workers were well rewarded. Paid a decent wage etc. NOT SO.

The 280 women shirt workers at the Banner textiles factory in Airdrie, Lanarkshire have ended their three-week old strike by a majority vote of nine to one, a decision forced on them through lack of money and out of concern for long-service workers threatened with loss of redundancy payments and other rights.

The struggle for a living wage started a year ago after the time and motion firm Kurt Salmon came in. The women discovered that their already low wage was getting lower by the week. New working methods and higher production targets meant many of the women were losing between £10 to £25 a week. Some were taking home little more than the basic wage of £26 (on average £34.40 before deductions) for a 40 hr week.

The shop stewards approached the management to try to negotiate a pay rise. The bosses refused to meet them. After two months of waiting patiently to be called, the women walked out and went on strike.

Almost immediately the manager, who rejoices in the name Mr Playfair, sacked every one of them — no redundancy payments, no notice of dismissal, no holiday pay. Their union, the National Union of Tailoring and Garment Workers, refused to help, claiming that the demand for a basic wage of £40 a week, was outside the government guide lines.

There was no strike fund. Married women could not claim Social Security — in fact many of the women who are single parents were refused any help from the local SS. No emergency payment for rent, dependent children etc. Then, just before the mass meeting at Airdrie Town Hall, the employers, Banner Textiles, approached the women and said that if there was a return to work the dismissal notices issued to all 280 strikers would be withdrawn.

One woman who has worked at Banner factory for over ten years said, "We get a ten minute break in the morning and half an

Call that soliciting?

Marie McMahon, a 31 year old Irish feminist, appeared in court in Dublin on September 14 charged with soliciting, swearing and resisting arrest. Some 200 supporters picketed outside, calling it a frame-up, victimisation of a woman well-known to the police for her political involvement, and an attack on women's right to walk the streets at night without fear of sexual assault or police harassment.

Not long before she was arrested, Marie had helped Radio Telefis Eireann research a programme on prostitution in Dublin. This programme, broadcast live, caused a legal controversy between RTE and the police because Lynn Gray, a prostitute, named a policeman whom she accused of assaulting

prostitutes.

The night she was arrested, July 27, Marie was walking home with Lynn Gray. A policeman approached them, told Lynn to walk on and arrested Marie. It's highly unlikely that he didn't recognise her since she'd lived in that area most of her life and had a police 'record' for political activity. She'd joined the Labour Party in 1968, been in the Irish Women's Liberation Movement since the beginning and was sentenced to three months in prison in 1971 for her part in an Anti-Vietnam War demonstration in Dublin. In 1972 she joined People's Democracy and co-edited their paper *Unfree Citizen*. Later she helped edit *Banshee* (journal of Irish Women United) and organise a protest meeting over



Marie McMahon

the banning of *Spare Rib* in Ireland. She also worked for the abolition of capital punishment and in the Murray Defence Committee.

Once her identity was firmly established at the police station, they still pressed charges. She appeared in court on July 28 and the case was remanded to September 7 and then again to September 14, when all the charges were finally dismissed. That's after two months of intimidation. O
Thanks to Lindi Stanley for info.

hour for lunch. The wage we get is ridiculous. We work now a 40 hour week to take home enough money to scrape by on." She added "Everything is going up including Banner's shirt prices and profits, yet our wage is shrinking".

Shop steward Helen Anderson said, "We intend to appoint more shop stewards and we will continue to fight for a basic wage of £1 an hour." O

Sandi Ritchie-Urquhart

Typists lose out

The first typists' strike (SR 75) is over. After around ten weeks out, London's Camden Council typists decided to return to work after their union NALGO's emergency committee refused to continue their strike pay.

The committee did this asserting that the management's offer was acceptable: the typists have won up to £222 extra a year subject to proficiency tests for relative newcomers, and supervisors' salaries are under arbitration. This

does not bring their wages up to those of the typists at nearby Islington Council.

"Things haven't cleared up," says Jane Franklin, one of the supervisors who has had to deal with years of high turnover and absentee rates. "There's bad feeling and a lot of the girls are applying for jobs at the post office."

So why did they go back? It appears that after one set of negotiations between union and management had begun, another was initiated by other officials of the local NALGO branch... after

THE CAP CONNECTION

£10,000 worth of contraceptives were seized by the Irish customs on August 30, just weeks before the introduction of a bill to legalise their sale. According to Irish law it is illegal to sell contraceptives. In the past, Family Planning Clinics have got around this by giving away supplies in return for 'donations'. With legal changes in the pipeline, a new non-profit company, Family Planning Distributors (FPD), started importing supplies for all the nine Family Planning Clinics in the Irish Republic.

The Revenue Commissioners responded by charging VAT to the tune of nearly £3,000—surely evidence of acceptability, if not strict legality. Then, just one month after confirming a new VAT rate of 20%, the Revenue Commissioners stepped in and prohibited the importation of a big consignment of goods.

At the same time, sale of the contraceptive Pill is carried on quite openly (FPD deals only in other kinds of contraceptives). In fact, after a recent 'anti-Pill' report, sales of the Pill dropped by 19%. It is, to say the least, ironic that just as women are changing from oral contraceptives to other methods, the other methods should be banned.

A court action challenging the

constitutionality of the Act prohibiting sales, has now been instituted by FPD and Galway FPA. Meanwhile, contraceptive supplies are running dangerously low. O

PUSHING HORMONES

Women's Health Care, the organisation promoting hormone replacement therapy, seems set to fold following the withdrawal of its sponsors and resignation of its medical council chairman.

The organisation is not a charity, nor a self-help group, despite a name with that flavour. It was sponsored by five pharmaceutical companies to promote to the public (ie. women) the HRT

drugs they manufacture.

The London clinic was offering treatment to women direct, bypassing their GP. It was attacked in the medical press for promoting HRT too zealously, given the doubts about its safety, and about the ethics of direct promotion. The criticisms were taken up by the *Guardian* and ITV's 'World in Action'.

As a result the drug companies have backed out, as have the medical 'names' WHC recruited to confer credibility on itself. But the organisation's director, public relations expert Joan Jenkins insists she will continue her advertising campaign—WHC's "terrific work" as she calls it—despite the setbacks. O

Eva Kaluzynska

resolution calling for "a TUC demonstration before the final parliamentary vote on any future restrictive abortion legislation".

★ Thanks to a resolution from the Tobacco Workers Union, "Congress demands that the Government no longer delay in providing a comprehensive and universal provision of free pre-school care and educational services." And . . .

★ The Bank Employees called for equality: "in the home; in the schools and colleges; in the places of work; and inside the trade union movement". Through this resolution, the General Council have been instructed to "organise and lead" a campaign towards this end. So there we have it sisters, the TUC General Council with all of its two women members are ready and waiting to lead us to liberation! O

TREATMENT FOR TENSION

Some people may think that Premenstrual Tension is a mystical experience from which we should gain strength. I think it is a bore and a blight which I could well do without, so the information that research into and treatment of PMT has been virtually stopped at St Thomas's Hospital London was definitely worth investigating. The reason for closure was—its popularity! The waiting list was nine months long, and without extra funding department chief, professor Taylor, felt that too much clinic time was being taken away from other gynaecological work.

It was particularly infuriating to discover that the paltry sum of £2-3,000 a year was all they needed to keep it open: the price of paying an outside consultant for one session a week with clerical backup. The clinic was always part of the gynaecological department and had never been funded as a separate entity, though the hospital gave an initial grant to get research off the ground four years ago. Since then it's been funded by those drug companies who could benefit from trials of their products.

Even they were not falling over themselves to help. When Roche was approached for a trial of Vitamin B6 treatment, they refused because their "vitamin budget had run out". Doctors at St Thomas's were sceptical; one suggested that Roche considered Vitamin B6 "small beer in comparison with psychotropics" (Valium and other 'mood altering' drugs).

In fact, the vitamin treatment was the one which interested me most. Trials have indicated that over two thirds of women treated

which the first set of negotiations tailed off and soon strike pay was stopped. "Once the union had split, the girls had had it," says Jane Franklin. The general meeting which followed the bad news saw 29 women vote to continue and 24 to return to work — saying they'd return even if the others stayed out. This broke the strike.

NALGO's internal affairs dominated the strike: to be backed and then dropped is a nasty experience. So although it's a pity they lacked unity when it came to the crunch, it's understandable.

Clare Cherrington

I am your automatic worker

Current developments in micro-electronics have major implications for the future employment of women — in terms of the number of jobs likely to be available, the level of skill required, the amount of control over the job and new health hazards such as severe eyestrain.

The development of the 'silicon chip' (this is the size of a thumbnail and has thousands of

electronic circuits etched on, which saves wiring up thousands of individual transistors to make a computer circuit) means that it is becoming more profitable for many jobs to be automated. The new word processors (like computerised typewriters) are already putting many typists out of work and bringing down the wages of others.

Two areas of women's employment likely to be affected are office work and light assembly work. A report by Siemens, a large German company, predicts that 40% of present office jobs will no longer exist by 1985. A French report estimates that 30% of jobs in banking and insurance will be lost in the next ten years.

Many women are employed in light assembly of goods with electric and electronic components — these are now being replaced by a smaller number of components, 'silicon chips'. Women have already been laid off in this sector, notably in telephone equipment and TV manufacture.

At a conference organised by TASS, the technical section of the engineering union, on September 16 to discuss "Computer Technology and Employment", Carmen Wootten from the National Women's Committee said

that lack of social facilities such as nurseries would mean that employers would try to discriminate against women in selection for retraining, and that women, especially part-timers, would be the first to be made redundant. The only defence, she said, is for women to be in strong trade unions and play a major role in them.

This whole issue needs to be widely discussed and action taken to ensure that the likely change in employment patterns is to our benefit. O

Jane Barker

LEADER LEN

Support for the Labour Party and opposition to the government's 5% pay limit were the major headline catchers at the TUC in September. A number of other resolutions with less media interest were passed including one or two of particular interest to women.

★ Abortion was the subject of one of the Medical Practitioners Union motions. It commits the TUC to opposing any attempts to amend the '67 Act; calls for pressure on the government to set up out-patient abortion facilities in every Area Health Authority and endorses the Women's TUC

with B6 (Pyridoxine) have noticed improvement in their PMT symptoms and between 40 and 45% considered their major symptoms cured. This treatment can be prescribed by a GP but can also be self administered. The dosage is 20 milligrammes (mg) morning and evening in mild cases, 40mg morning and evening in severe cases. The course should start three days before the onset of symptoms and be continued until the time the symptoms usually stop. (Many women find that symptoms start at ovulation, about half way through the cycle, and get worse nearer to the period.) The smaller dose can be stepped up before the period to a maximum of 50mg morning and evening, but it's not advisable to take more as the acid content doesn't do the stomach much good.

At these dosages the treatment seems to be free of side effects. Of course there haven't yet been studies of women taking such high doses on a long term basis (the 'normal' intake is 2mg a day) but as the vitamin is water soluble, the body should absorb what it needs and excrete the rest.

Dr Brush, the man responsible for the St Thomas's research, was keen that many more people should know about the latest PMT research but he did stress that if the vitamin treatment doesn't work you shouldn't give up hope. Other treatments are available. The chemistry involved in PMT is pretty complicated and some women respond only to specialised treatment. St Thomas's is no longer in a position to help but University College London is still running sessions. Again there is a nine month waiting list. (If you wish to pay, Dr Dalton will see you privately rather sooner than that!) Sheffield also has a PMT clinic and if anyone knows of others, please let us know. O

Angela Phillips

Tube Transplant

When an ovum was mixed with sperm in a test tube and implanted in a womb, excitement reached such a pitch that the birth actually made the TV news (perhaps that's why it was a caesarian—so much nicer for family viewing than a cunt?). Now doctors from a London teaching hospital are journeying to Taunton in Somerset to carry out the world's first fallopian tube transplant. If the transplant 'takes' and doesn't re-block with scar tissue, the recipient will be equipped for pregnancy.

The result could bring great happiness to one woman and enormous prestige to the medical team. But is this really the best use of scarce resources in a country with the worst infant mortality rate in Europe? O

Breast tests

Breast cancer screening trials are due to start in four different areas of Britain. In Edinburgh and Guildford the trials will use mammography every two years combined with clinical examinations, while in Huddersfield and Nottingham women will be taught breast self examination.

The programme will last for seven years and will be matched with areas where no screening is being done. In each area, 30,000 women between 45 and 64 will participate. The results should provide some concrete information on the best way of reducing the high mortality rate from breast cancer. O

DIAL A SEX OBJECT

Booksellers were recently circulated with some new-style publicity from Hutchinson's for their forthcoming book *Sharky's Machine*. When I dialled the number on this cardboard cut-out phone (designed for display in bookshops), a woman's voice, low, with an American drawl—the kind that signals 'sexy'—said: "Hi, I'm Domino. I'm so glad you called. Why don't we take it easy.



Lie back and I'll tell you all about myself. Do you want to know what I'm wearing right now? Black silk—very fine silk, a white garter belt and sheer white stockings. I'm a very special lady. Rich—very rich. Men pay 500 dollars for me now and I make sure they enjoy every cent."

The voice goes on to mention the man who controls her—and scares her, the dead body in her apartment. Then, with a supposedly tantalizing "anyway, I don't want to talk about it any more...", she refers you to the book.

It's one of the crudest examples of the use of a sex-object to promote a product. It's also mixed with other stock themes designed to titillate: violence, murder and fame ("even the next president of the United States is in love with me").

Ironically, Hutchinson's also publish feminist books. This year they brought out *Women Take*

Issue—subtitled 'Aspects of Women's Subordination'. Maybe we should tell Hutchinson's we intend not to buy their books until they reconsider their sales techniques. They're at 3 Fitzroy Sq, London W1. Wendy Holloway

CENTURY OF STRUGGLE



Leonora Cohen died on September 5 in a North Wales nursing home. At 105 she was the oldest surviving suffragette.

She spent her first 93 years in Leeds, where she was secretary of the Women's Social and Political Union. Back copies of *Votes for Women* and *The Suffragette* show her setting up talks on Sweated Labour or the White Slave Trade, opening her house for weekly tea-time discussions, and arranging a fundraising dance—"fancy dress optional".

Her first interest seems always to have been the conditions of working women. In 1913 she was part of a suffrage deputation to Lloyd George from all over the country: shop assistants, servants, factory workers, teachers, nurses, fisherwomen and 'pit brow lasses'. Leonora Cohen spoke for the tailoresses working at 1½d an hour to men's 6½d: "In slack time the girls go day after day to the factory and get no work. A hunted look comes over their faces as they realise they are being driven on to the streets. Raise their status, Mr Lloyd George, help them to get rid of that hunted look." But he wouldn't commit himself, so the whole deputation of 300 women stayed on in London—and spent the evening at the Drury Lane pantomime!

Four days later, they set off to deliver a petition to Parliament, only to be refused admission and badly beaten up by the police. Leonora Cohen was knocked under a policeman's horse, trampled and dragged to Cannon Row station. At this time she was a married woman of 40 with a history of TB which made any prison sentence dangerous. Nonetheless, she'd done time in Holloway two years earlier. This time, she decided, "I didn't fancy window-breaking, but I had come

to London and I didn't intend to return to Leeds without making my protest".

And so she hit on the idea that gained her the name of 'the Tower Suffragette'—"remembering Colonel Blood, who once tried to steal the Crown Jewels... I took out a bar from the grate, filed it down, packed it in a small parcel and started for the Tower". Once there, she hurled her weapon at the Order of the Garter in its display case. "There was an awful crash of breaking glass. Two Beefeaters rushed at me, and grabbed me by the shoulders, demanding why I had done this thing. I told them it was because of the Government's treachery to the working women of Great Britain in withholding the Enfranchisement Bill." She was led through the East End streets, followed by a small procession of schoolchildren and passers-by (it was a Saturday), spent some hours in a "filthy cell", was bailed out and eventually succeeded in getting off with a fine. But her protest was the signal for full-scale militancy, and women all over the country stepped up their war on the property of men.

"We are law-breakers", said Emmeline Pankhurst, "because we would be law-makers". And Leonora Cohen's later life took a respectable turn. She served as a magistrate for 30 years, got an OBE for her work in the community and became the first woman on the visiting board of Armly Prison—a place she knew from the inside. She'd spent her last sentence there on hunger strike after smashing the windows of the Labour Exchange... O

Amanda Sebestyen

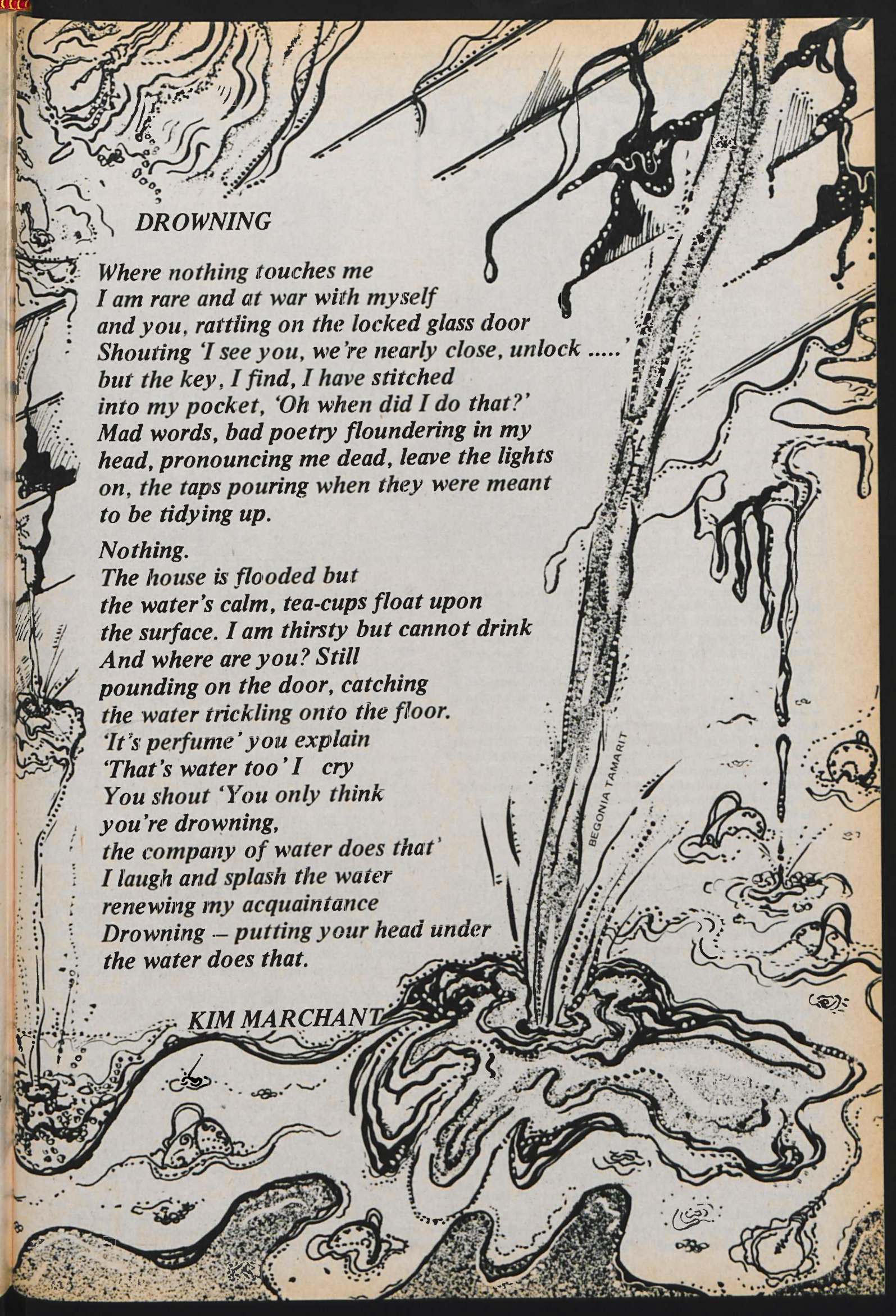
Gawping

The first 'Miss Commonwealth beauty contest' is scheduled for November 18, staged at London's Commonwealth Institute by the Commonwealth Re-settlement Association. They're sending begging letters to "organisations and businesses with Commonwealth interests"—"We note the project is starting with zero capital" said one recipient, "let's hope it finishes (soon) with the same amount (or even less!)". O

Gloating

"Success is juicy, fruity, fresh and cheap" says an ad in *Campaign*, the newspaper for advertisers. Why? "Mainly because the nation's gone to the watchdogs" and filled the newspapers with comments on the ads produced by Michael Feld for Wells Jaffa drink.

"More intriguing", Feld's agency adds, "is the resulting 47% sales boost. For some proper blood and guts publicity, call Feld on 01-235 7996." Anything to say to him, sisters? O



DROWNING

*Where nothing touches me
I am rare and at war with myself
and you, rattling on the locked glass door
Shouting 'I see you, we're nearly close, unlock'
but the key, I find, I have stitched
into my pocket, 'Oh when did I do that?'
Mad words, bad poetry floundering in my
head, pronouncing me dead, leave the lights
on, the taps pouring when they were meant
to be tidying up.*

Nothing.

*The house is flooded but
the water's calm, tea-cups float upon
the surface. I am thirsty but cannot drink
And where are you? Still
pounding on the door, catching
the water trickling onto the floor.
'It's perfume' you explain
'That's water too' I cry
You shout 'You only think
you're drowning,
the company of water does that'
I laugh and splash the water
renewing my acquaintance
Drowning — putting your head under
the water does that.*

KIM MARCHANT

Women Writing



Jean Radford with Michele Roberts and Sara Maitland

This month sees the publication of first novels by two feminists, Sara Maitland and Michele Roberts.

Sara Maitland's *Daughter of Jerusalem* explores the relation between sexuality and maternity through the story of Liz, a feminist who desperately wants a child, loves her husband Ian — and only ovulates when he isn't around. Liz's relationships with the infertility doctor, her women's group and her mother are described in a sharp dramatic style undercut with passages which connect her predicament back to barren women of the past, the other 'daughters of Jerusalem'.

Michele Roberts' *A Piece of the Night* is a portrait of a needy, greedy anti-heroine, Julie Fanchot, and tells through a series of flashbacks the history of her Normandy childhood, marriage and motherhood, and her life in a women's commune in South London. The novel is a poetic recreation of that past, and explores how Julie comes to terms in the present with her homosexuality and herself.

Jean Radford asked the authors about the process and problems of writing, and how their feminism relates to their work.

Jean: Would you call your novels feminist? Did you write as feminists for a particular audience or was it wider than that?

Michele: I don't think I had that in mind when I started. I wanted to write, I *needed* to write, and the sense of being a woman writing is very important for me. I do think that the gender of a writer affects what you write and the ways you can write — which is very different from the way some men have written in the past, as if man equals human race. Whereas I'm very conscious of having written from my sense of gender identity in quite a pain-filled and angry way. So that's one of the things which makes my novel feminist, as I see it.

Sara: This is something we talked a lot about in the writing group we were both in — you know, what is a feminist novel. I think that both our novels are feminist in the very simple sense that we are both in the women's movement. For instance, I became interested in infertility because I was involved in abortion campaigns. Suddenly I was talking to people who had a problem about choice which was the other side of the abortion problem. Talking to women about why they wanted kids, what they were going to do with them when they had them, I was confronted with a group of women who'd been left out of the whole feminist discussion about children. I saw the subject as feminist because it's about the

way the choices you're supposed to be able to make in this society are really governed by very conflicting images of women.

Michele: Right. I feel that in *A Piece of the Night* I'm obsessed with a very basic question: what do I feel about being a woman? I think that's what my heroine achieves — an encounter with the different images of women. She has to look at her family and family relationships because that's where she started from, that's what gave her the meanings she lives by.

Sara: Also, I always thought that one of the things a feminist could do in fiction which is difficult in other forms of writing is introduce some of the real contradictions without being heretical. Somehow you can say that women are not always very sisterly, that women — including feminists — are often confused about what they want and how they want to do things. I felt a kind of freedom in writing fiction, a freedom to say it's not that simple.

Michele: I think the practice of writing is in one way like consciousness-raising, the practice of women talking together in groups. Because in writing you claim for yourself what many women still can't do — take time for yourself, experience pleasure and strength in thinking about yourself. I feel that's something we're still struggling to do as women.

Jean: That comes through very strongly when your central character promises to write a story about her childhood for her daughter:

We carry the memory of our childhood like a photograph in a locket, fierce and possessive, for pain or calm. Everybody's past is inviolate, separate, sacrosanct; our heads are different countries with no maps or dictionaries; people walk vast deserts of grief or inhabit walled gardens of joy. Tell me about your past, Julie begins to urge other women, and they to urge her. The women sit in circles talking.

That paragraph evoked the beginnings of the movement very vividly for me.

Michele: Yes, it was important to show her starting to talk to other women in new ways, as well as beginning to write. Writing is more solitary, although when I write I'm always

aware of invisible presences.

Sara: Those presences, visible or not, were often constraints for me, though. A number of my feminist friends have criticised certain parts of my novel, for example, a scene where the heroine's husband beats her up and she goes back to him. They said you can't put that in a feminist novel, that's wrong, she shouldn't do it. There's a moral imperative here to say to the world that a man who uses physical force on his wife is beyond the pale. To show the woman returning to such a husband is an encouragement to wife-battering. To which I respond that women do it and I want to write about it.

Jean: I think a lot of women, feminists or not, want to read about it too. We *want* novels which treat women's hostilities and contradictions – anyway, I don't want women to break into speech simply to mouth a few shining half-truths! I take it as a sign of strength, evidence that we're eight years on and don't need to be moralistic or defensive about the problems we all know exist.

Michele: Well, one of the most feminist things about writing my novel is what it did for *me*. It enabled me to reclaim something I thought was lost for ever with childhood – which was the sense of creativity, of play, the sheer enjoyment of making something. As a woman I thought you gave this up with puberty – you entered on a life of service with no time of your own, no time for play.

Jean: You think the sense of owning your own time, playing and writing, comes easier to men than women?

Michele: Yes, I do. The idea that it's right to spend time doing what you want – and pushing for it – is given more to men. I'm not married with a child like Sara, but I do have an unconscious which is filled with messages from my mother about the things women are supposed to do. It was a real struggle to let myself write. This isn't such an acute problem for male writers. You go off and do it – and have a wife bringing you sandwiches at lunchtime if you're lucky. Whereas for you and me, Sara, we had to fight for that space in our domestic lives.

Sara: But that's true of everything, not just writing. At least I got paid to write this novel, not very much certainly, in terms of pennies per hour, but real *money*. But the thing that faces every woman is that she has no right to her own time.

Michele: And her own room – the time and place to write are symbolic of the space that all women are fighting for.

Jean: Virginia Woolf made that same point in *A Room of One's Own*, didn't she? Incidentally, Woolf wrote about these things in her essays and diaries, but kept them relatively separate from her fiction; both of you, on the other hand, seem to use very direct, personal material in your novels. Can I ask why you, although clearly drawing from your own lives and experience, chose to invent heroines who were not yourselves? Why you decided to create characters called Liz and Julie and talk about them in the third person and not use the first person, as Kate Millet did in *Flying*, for example?

Michele: I think I did it because my novel is about a woman who, at the beginning of the book, is so angry and needy that she is cut off from other people, she's in a little world of her own. I wanted to look at that, rather than reflect it on the page. I was worried that if I wrote it in the first person, the reader might not be able to see I was *looking at it*. I don't know whether I've succeeded, of course – but I wanted to show how she emerges from an enclosed world, a sort of madness, to a stage of dialogue with others.

Jean: So the third person is to help the reader look at this woman's experience, rather than simply sharing it, identifying with it.

Sara: I think there are also technical limitations with using 'I'; you can only analyse what that person does in terms of what they can see and analyse about themselves. Both our novels are focussed very much around one character (perhaps that's a

feature of first novels) but using the third person at least you can say things *about* that character, you have more distance on them. Even in the third person, though, using the present tense to write we're forced to deal with extremely sensory perceptions of women – that's why food is important in Michele's novel and gut is important in mine.

Jean: But then Michele's use of food and your use of the body do represent things beyond the present, the concrete, beyond your individual heroines in fact. Michele's emphasis on food doesn't come across *just* as a personal obsession of Julie's (or Michele's!). It suggests the whole role of nurturing, mother-child love, intake and exchange in women's lives. So it refers to much larger issues.

Michele: Talking about structure, I think I was ambitious to write a 'readable' novel, that's why at first I wanted it to be a thriller, a work of continuous metaphor that people could have fun with. Originally I was going to call it *Dead Nuns Tell No Tales*, sort of sub-Chandler. In the first draft, all the chapters had detective-story headings, for example, and some of that element lingers. I wanted the reader to puzzle over the opening paragraph on the dead nun, to work out who she was and what importance the naming of the dead nun has – as a character but also as a metaphor for women's sexuality.

Jean: A lot of readers will be struck by one obvious similarity between your books – your use of religious references and images. Why did you use these?

Sara: One of the reasons I did it was to broaden out the heroine's personal experience into something I could show as a continual experience for women: being repudiated, socially outcast for being barren. It was to throw some light on her reasons for wanting to have a child, the reasons many of us want to have babies. In fact, I've never actually seen a sub-fertility doctor or a gynaecologist. That aspect of the novel is not autobiographical. Liz's problem is an imaginary one.

Jean: It's very well imagined then. I think the desire for a child and the obsessions and griefs about not having one come through very strongly, for instance in your opening paragraph where you're describing her feelings of frustration and violence:

She pushed the balls of her thumbs into her eye-sockets, hard. Yellow streaks and whorls shot across the blue film. She pushed almost hard enough to hurt herself. She thought she might scream or faint or kill someone. After a small moment she found she had done none of these things and she leaned forward, elbows on her knees, exhausted, trying to relax. When she opened her eyes nothing had changed: the bus was still stopped at the red lights and below her a pretty girl in long skirts and a long scarf was trying to tuck both up so she could start her bike when the lights changed.

Sara: I'm only saying it isn't part of my experience. The gynaecologist that Liz sees really is invented. He's based more on my whole complaints about the N.H.S. and the way it operates against women. It's not a personal vendetta against my local sub-fertility clinic!

Jean: But what I was getting at about the religious images, was how far your novels criticise the traditional representations of women – in literature, advertising, ideology generally. In Michele's book there's a critique; in yours, Sara, there's a return in some sense. But neither of you seem to provide or use any new, specifically feminist symbols for women.

Sara: No, we both rely quite heavily on biblical images. But what I was trying to say is that these stories which we're all familiar with could be *other* than they are said to be. That what the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, create together is a moment of creative energy – it's not just the moment of acceptance of what God the father has ordained. But yes, I'm re-telling these stories, not creating new ones.

Michele: I think my project was to show a woman rejecting the icons she's lived by, and right at the end of the book you have a feeling she might construct new ones. But my Catholic

imagery works in two ways: at the realistic level, because it's a novel about a woman brought up as a Catholic and going to convent school, but also metaphorically. But I'd also like to say that I think I use lesbianism as a new icon. You've said, Jean, that you thought I was a bit romantic about Julie's choice to become a lesbian — that she replaces the model of the whore, the saint etc with the notion of 'the lesbian'.

Jean: I feel 'the lesbian' is a very potent symbol as an image of certain possibilities for women; it has to represent so many things — strength, independence etc, and not just for lesbian women. My query was more that you don't indicate other options.

Michele: But Julie does realise that she has to stop putting the phone down on her husband, she has to struggle with a man. It's true, though, that I didn't develop possibilities for the other women in the commune.

Sara: I think I should have developed the other characters much more too. I could have shown more clearly that heterosexuality isn't just about maternity.

Jean: Isn't this a problem with narratives which are centred on single characters? For instance, Fay Weldon in *Down Among the Women* tries to present women more collectively to avoid being thought prescriptive. Although you both supply groups of women as a context for your heroines, your novels are still focussed very much on the individual.

Sara: What I really want to do next is write a woman's family saga.

Michele: And I want to get a man in my next novel!

Sara: I had enormous difficulties writing Liz's husband — who's not exactly a butch machismo male. In my first draft I spent all my time getting him off-stage. I concentrated on the woman wanting a baby as a sexual act.

Jean: I found that quite disturbing: you celebrate women through the ages in terms of fertility, conception, childbirth. Woman as a sexual subject is very much a reproductive woman?

Sara: Yes, because I believe that women's sexuality has been newly colonised by men. Women have a much wider range of sexual activities than simply fucking — menstruation, childbirth, lactation, the menopause. And one of the most important things I was trying to do in *Daughter of Jerusalem* was to give those acts of women the same significance that male culture has traditionally given to the act of penetration.

Michele: I agree that we want to reclaim them as the sexual acts they undoubtedly are, but surely the oppression that surrounds the heterosexual act frequently means that women displace their sexual energy onto menstruation, onto landscape, onto food?

Jean: But you both refuse any definition of sex as purely genital, so you *de-centre* sexuality . . . you open it up for redefinition.

Michele: Yes, but while Julie's lesbianism is for her synonymous with autonomy, it's also her way of accepting her need for other people. It's by defining herself as a lesbian that she's able to be both needy and independent in the world. But she can't operate in any relationship until she's separated herself from her mother. I'm not saying oppression is with a man, liberation is with a woman.

Sara: And I didn't want people to think that my character Ian had 'grown out' of his gayness into an 'adult' heterosexuality. That's why the most 'adult' reflective, sane, loving character is in fact a gay man.

Michele: I also didn't want to suggest that what Julie grew out of was 'straightness'.

Sara: Neither of us want to say that there is a right sexuality

and a wrong one. And I don't want to be read as saying that the only good vagina is a full one! It's about a woman with an obsession with having a child, not an endorsement of straight reproductive relationships.

Jean: Well, I'm glad we sorted that one out!

Michele: A theme I tried to develop was around language. The language women have is not heard, partly because the dominant culture just doesn't want to hear and understand it, and partly because it can be a very spiky, angry language. My heroine has problems with speech and being heard, whether she can talk to people or only to herself, and how much she colluded in that, how much she actually *wanted* to be on her own talking to herself.

Jean: You certainly use the speech-silence opposition in quite crucial ways, like in the initial rape scene in which Claire, the mother in the novel, conceives Julie. You record the fact that the man doesn't use the courtship rituals that Claire has read about in novels, but presents his male sexuality in ways she has no words to deal with. And so a crucial element in her rape is that she is silenced — dumbfounded — by the form of male sexuality. Are you making a parallel as a writer between women's access to culture, to language, to active writing, and your heroine's struggle against her own sexual impotence?

Michele: Yes, I think to some extent I am.

Sara: I do think that all of us when we write about explicit sex now are writing into a vacuum. There is a tradition in which men can write, there are images they can use that have a kind of literary credence. Whereas women writers I've talked to about this say that they can find no language that feels both original to them and within a tradition that they have access to.

The very word *penetration* is a totally 'masculist' word. There's a female word which is *enclosure*, but it doesn't mean anything to anybody. There's *embrace*, *enclosing*, *entrapping* — *entrapping* is quite an interesting one because it sounds negative, but that in fact is what a woman does, she takes it down, she holds it down . . . I do think women are *desexed* by the language art uses to describe their sexuality.

Jean: So one of the points in writing about women's experience is making an intervention into male language and culture?

Michele: Yes, but it's clearer to say male-dominated language and culture. Male and female language aren't that separate, they refer to each other, they are confused by each other, they miss each other.

Jean: Michele, you said that the easiest and most pleasurable sections of your novel to write were the descriptions of landscape, cityscapes, etc.

Michele: Yes, there I felt I marked out a territory which was actually mine, and the pleasure I felt in describing, say, South London, was the pleasure I'm supposed to feel in sex, but sometimes don't feel, and feel very hung up about not feeling — so that in writing I was able to experience a sensuality which had not been colonised.

Jean: So the act of writing can be an act of pleasure, of reparation?

Sara: I'd go further than that and say an act of *power*. You invent these people, you can make them do what the fuck you like, if you are fed up with them you can bloody kill them off. They're absolutely mine, I created them and I control them. Writing is a real act of power which I achieve nowhere else. I can't stop my child from riding her bicycle if she wants to go on doing it when I say it's bedtime. There's sweet FA I can do to stop her . . . But you can be so nice to your characters too! You can deal with them in exactly the way society deals with you — *as it chooses*. I like having that control.■

A Piece of the Night will be published by The Women's Press on October 30, and *Daughter of Jerusalem* on October 9 by Blond and Briggs.

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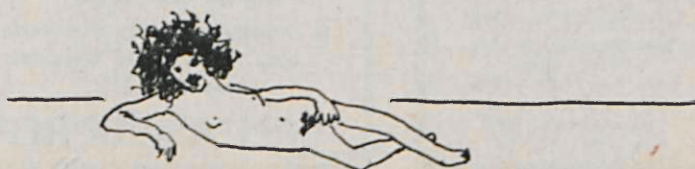
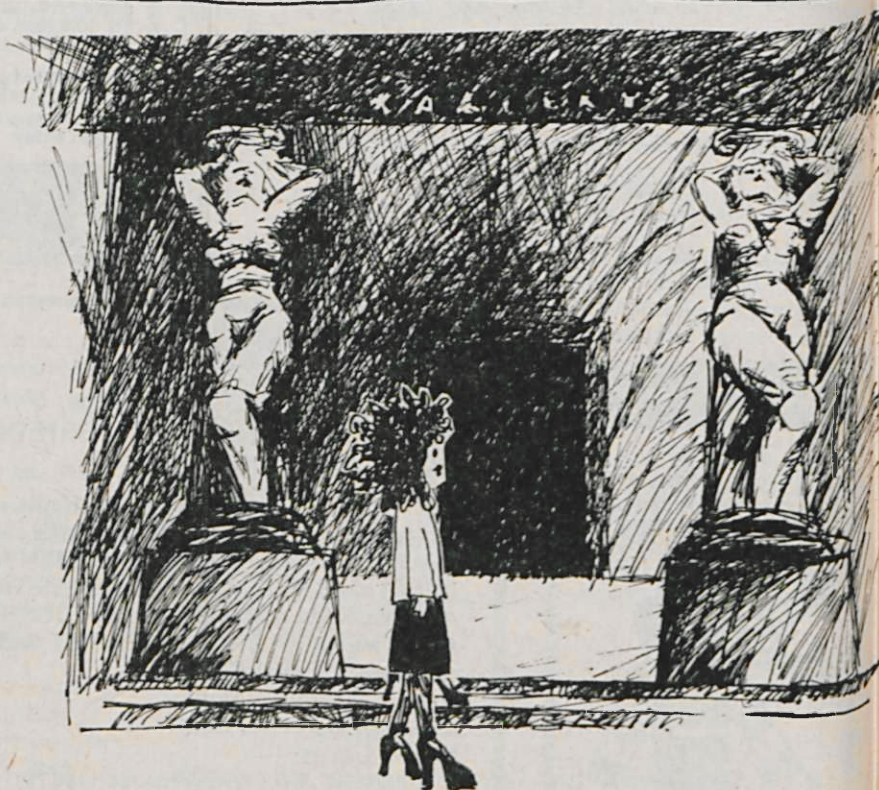
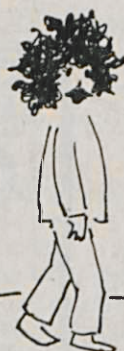
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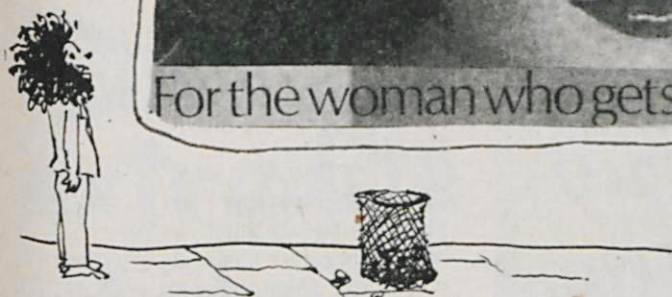
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Bombay slums: *rising up against rape*

In Worli, one of Bombay's slums, a woman was raped on March 2. Not that it's unusual for a woman to be raped anywhere, and this time too it might have gone almost unremarked. But this woman was six months pregnant and thought to have been gang-raped by 20 youths (in fact there were five or six), and she was missing for days afterwards, probably hidden away by her family. Throughout the city's slum areas, women were shocked; they talked together and began to share their own experiences of sexual humiliation and assault. As a result, just six days later, on International Women's Day, some 2,500 women and 500 men marched in protest through the slums. Since then women have begun to organise defence groups so they don't have to walk alone to market or along the railway lines to the latrines, and have held fairly regular women's meetings.

I heard all this from Sujata Gothoskar, whom I met at a recent conference in Brighton on the subordination of women, attended by women from many Third World countries, mainly doing research into women's questions or working in such areas as contraception or women's health. Sujata, who lives on the edge of the slum area, had at that time been in a Socialist Women's Group (now disbanded) which took part in the demonstration distributing a long leaflet in Hindi demanding the recognition of housework as work, community help with childcare, equal pay and working conditions, and a woman's right to control her own fertility. As most slum women are illiterate, the leaflet had to be read aloud at various stages on the march. For most women this was their first demonstration, and the first time they had protested publicly about wife-beating and rape, previously hidden away as shameful personal problems.

"We dare not go out alone"

Sujata had also been involved for some time in the Slumdwellers United Front, a broad association mainly of local men and some outside activists, formed to resist the state's attempts to demolish

their huts and evict them. As all slum housing is considered temporary there, slumdwellers have no security against evictions. People had also refused to pay the enormous rents that were squeezed out of them. But as Sujata pointed out, few women were actively involved in these struggles: "Very few of them came out for the meetings. Those women who did come were primarily women working as wage-labourers, who had struggled elsewhere, or old women who had little household work to do."

The rape issue "touched an area of their life which was very intimate to them and had always been neglected". Sujata feels that the eruption around it was made easier by the background of the fight to protect their own homes: "The atmosphere of resistance had already developed". But only on an overtly women's question did most women feel strongly enough to risk taking action. "Even women from Haryana, who usually come out of the kitchen only after having covered their faces, were eager to discuss this incident", says Sujata. "They came out for all the meetings and insisted that all the slum women do something to protest. They spoke excitedly about how this was no rare and unique occurrence. They cited the names of men around and discussed — most probably for the first time — how they were sexually harassed, even by men who went around as 'leaders'. 'The rape at Worli is really gruesome', said one woman, 'but here in our *basties* (slums) men treat us no differently. We are beaten up regularly. We dare not go out alone. We are now organising groups of 15-20 women. Only collectively would we be able to protect ourselves.'

"In the beginning I thought it was all my fault"

"At another meeting I was at, one woman suddenly burst out and demanded of her husband, 'What are you talking about unity amongst us for? You beat me up everyday. I know how you treat other women.' The others interrupted, 'This is your *domestic* affair. Don't bring it up in public meetings.' Another woman angrily shouted, 'How you treat us, women, and our sisters, is a domestic affair is it? What are we here for then?'"

As well as mixed meetings about facilities and housing, where more women speak up than dared before, there are now meetings just for women: "When the male activists left, the women just burst out with their feelings." At these meetings they have also discussed *why* men rape: one woman from Worli said, "Except for the *goonda* elements (hooligans) the others are not really to be blamed. They are unemployed, without a house. They cannot get married. That is one reason why they raped our sister." The raped woman herself said, "In the beginning I thought it was all my fault. But now I am beginning to feel it is not exactly so — something else is the matter." Some of the women put it down to madness, to sexual frustration or to male biology. Sujata looks for an explanation in an analysis of the ills of capitalist society: individual workers sell their labour power on the labour market; women's unwaged work at home appears to be superfluous; men, alienated at work, seek recognition by dominating their wives. The woman becomes the man's possession — and so is 'protected' from other men. But Sujata freely admits that this is inadequate to explain "why the man and woman seek to fulfil their own humanity in totally contradictory ways — one by being aggressive, domineering, subjecting the other; the other by being submissive, docile, accepting the domination — it remains as an open question." ●

Jill Nicholls

Don't extradite Astrid



Outside Bow St court where Astrid Proll is being remanded

Anna Puttick came to London from West Germany four years ago. She was known among her friends and co-workers as a sincere and committed feminist and anti-fascist. In her work as a gardener in Hackney, as a fitter's mate in Lesney's East London factory and as a teacher of mechanics to young unemployed people, she established a reputation for uncompromising resistance to oppression and authoritarianism. Friends enjoyed her help in childcare and her personal support. Women who attended her class in car maintenance found her a sympathetic teacher.

It came as a shock to all Anna's friends and workmates when she was arrested on September 15, dragged handcuffed from the garage where she worked and identified as Astrid Proll, 'terror girl' of the gutter press headlines. The press, acting like police, sniffed out and harassed her friends, connected her with the active 'terrorist scene' in West Germany now. And, as usual where women are concerned, they trivialised the vital political issues of her case in their grubbing for personal details: 'Sexy secrets of Terror Girl' smeared the *Sunday Mirror*. She was said to look like a man, swear like a man and to have raped some man's girlfriend at a party (how far their fantasies go!). The usual rubbish was trotted out about the psychology of 'girl guerillas': 'The increase of female violence' was blamed by the *Daily Mirror* on 'the problems of liberated women trying to cope with difficult jobs. They become aggressive, infertile and lose their sex drive. Their voices become deeper — and they even grow hairs on their chests. As they discard their feminine inhibitions they become irrational.'

Since then, Astrid's friends have worked to piece together the story of her life in West Germany and the reason

for her flight to England. Astrid was arrested in May 1971 in West Germany, in connection with Red Army Fraction (RAF) activities. Before her trial, she spent three years in prison, two in solitary confinement. The West German authorities defined RAF members as criminals, but subjected them to torture reserved for political prisoners. In the 'Silent Wing' of Ossendorf Prison near Cologne, Astrid was tortured by sensory deprivation — complete absence of normal light, movement and sound — for a total of 4½ months. Ulrike Meinhof, who spent 231 days there, described it like this: 'The feeling that one's spine is drilling into the brain, that one is pissing one's soul away. . . the feeling that the whole layer of skin has been ripped away.'

As a result of this treatment, Astrid suffered severe circulatory collapse. Her trial in 1974 had to be halted because prison doctors warned that she would die if she remained in prison. Released to a clinic, she escaped to England to build a new life away from her RAF connections.

From the moment of her arrest, Astrid and her friends have stressed repeatedly that they fear for her life. To British newspaper readers, this may seem an exaggeration. But as well as her poor health, the situation in West Germany speaks for itself. It is a 'democracy' where the Interior Minister has declared that 'The enemy is people'; where, under new laws, citizens can be jailed without trial, kept for months in pre-trial solitary confinement, and arrested for the mental crime of 'sympathising'; where people can lose their jobs because of political beliefs; and where no less than *eight* RAF prisoners have died in the custody of the state and many other suspects have been shot on

sight. The wartime fascist apparatus remains at the heart of the state machine and the trade unions police their own members on behalf of the state. Each new law designed to counter the 'terrorist threat' curtails civil liberties still further. And people are afraid to speak out, because that would put them in the category of 'sympathisers'.

The RAF has been presented as a criminal gang bent on wanton destruction. Its founders were, in fact, political activists who believed that urban guerilla tactics were the only way to fight Germany's support of the US position in the Vietnam war and increasing state surveillance of individuals. The student and youth movement from which the RAF emerged was diffused when its militants were granted political amnesty. The RAF's tactics and analysis succeeded only in providing justification for greater state repression, but that cannot justify their treatment in prison, nor the unanswered questions about the mysterious deaths of Meinhof, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe. The charges against Astrid Proll (RAF membership and attempted murder of two policemen) should make her a political prisoner.

Astrid needs the support of all British feminists, as a political activist and feminist herself. Her support group, 'the Friends of Astrid Proll', is fighting her extradition and asking for the Home Secretary to grant her political asylum rather than sanctioning the West German government's actions by sending her back to possible death. We are also trying to give her the daily support she needs to survive and to believe in a better future for herself. If you can help, contact FAP at 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1. ●

Karen Margolis

SHORT LIST INFORMATION TO ANNY BRACKX 27 CLERKENWELL CLOSE LONDON EC1

TALKS AND CONFERENCES

Sexual Oppression in Education
19 October. Meeting 7.00-9.30 at Friends Meeting House, Euston Rd, London WC1. Organised by London Gay Teachers and others committed to fighting all forms of sexual oppression in education.

Women and Weight
19 October. Talk 7.30 at the EGA Hospital, Euston Rd, London NW1. With Susie Orbach and EGA doctors. All women welcome. Contact 01-582 0009 if baby-sitting is needed.

Women and Politics
20 October. Women's Research and Resources Centre talk 7.30 at 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1 (01-253 7568). Speaker

CSE Sex and Class Working Group
21 October. First meeting 11.30 at Birkbeck College, Malet St, London WC1. Speakers: Floya Anthias on the family and ideology, and Irene Bruegel on the family. Childcare can be arranged (let them know). For papers and contact list send £1 to Ruth Norris, School of Applied Social Studies, University of Bradford (0274 33466).

National Socialist Feminist Conference.
21 October. Planning meeting (for a conference in March/April '79) 11am at 14 Piccadilly, third floor (entrance at 6 Gore St), Manchester.

A Rape Crisis Centre for South Wales
21/22 October. School starting 10.30 at the Poly of Wales, Treforest. The South Wales Rape Crisis Group want to set up a Rape Crisis Centre to provide help and support for rape victims and to act as a campaigning body. Speakers from London Rape Crisis Centre, workshops on how to run a centre, counselling, raising funds... Social in the evening. Entrance £1.50 (70p non-earners) for the weekend, and £1 (50p non-earners) for Saturday only. Accommodation and creche available. Details from SWAPAC, Bethesda Chapel, Bethesda St, Merthyr Tydfil, Mid-Glam (0685-6251/2).

One Man's Leisure - Another Woman's Work?
23 October. Tyneside Socialist Centre Meeting 7.30 at 115 Westgate Rd, Newcastle. "The woman in the home has to adjust to the needs of industry by coping with the effects of the conditions in

24 Spare Rib

which their men have to work. How does shiftwork for example, affect her domestic routine? She provides for his 'leisure' - who provides for hers?" Speakers from Wages for Housework Campaign, other women's groups, two local shiftworkers' wives. Details from Newcastle 29057.

Women and Ireland
25 October. Talk 8.00 at the Everyman Bistro, Hope St, Liverpool. Speaker Margo Gorman (Lancaster Women and Socialism Group). Adm. 25p (40p non-members).

Women's History
27 October. Feminist History Group discussion on research and resources 7.30 at the WRRC as above. Contributions and problems welcome. Details from Anna Davin, 71 Balfour St, London SE17 (01-703 5275).

WRRC-Progress and Problems
28 October. All day meeting from 10.30 at the WRRC as above. Open to all subscribers, to discuss progress and problems of the WRRC in the past year, and to examine possibilities for the future-improvements to the newsletter, the seminars... Items for the agenda should be in by 21 October. Tea, coffee available, but bring food and a cushion.

Imperialism-Past and History
29 October. Socialist Feminist Educational in a series on women and imperialism 10.30-6.00 at the Methodist Church Hall, Lancaster Rd, London W11. Entrance £1 (50p non-earners). Creche, cheap vegetarian food available. Details from Janet Hadley, 7 Lynton Court, Horn Lane, London W3.

Women and Depression
29 October. Conference 12.00-5.00 at Watford Central Primary School, Derby Rd, Watford. Social afterwards at Carey Place Youth and Community Centre. Entrance £1. Details from Sandy, 58 Cross Rd, Bushey, Watford.

Women in Media
30 October. Meeting 7.00 at the Globe (the Private Room), 43-47 Marylebone Rd, London NW1. Discussion on offensive television commercials, and taxation reform. Meetings every last Monday of the month. Details from Women in Media c/o 12 St John's Wood Rd, London NW8.

The Menopause
1 November. Symposium 7.30 at Arnhem Gallery, Fairfield Hall, Park Lane, Croydon. Speaker Wendy Cooper on physical changes and their reasons, premenstrual tension, and Hormone Replacement Therapy. A panel

including a gynaecologist will answer questions from the audience. Free literature and a Woman Care Information stand on display. All welcome. Entrance £1. Details from the FPA, 13A Western Rd, Hove, Sussex (Brighton 774075).

Immigration and Racism
11 November. Socialist Feminist Educational 10.30-7.00 at the Methodist Church Hall as above. Slides and films.

Gays in Education
11/12 November. Conference starting 10am at the Birmingham Gay Centre. "An opportunity to share the problems of being gay and in education (students, teachers, librarians, administrators...) - and also to look at possibilities for action: fighting for gay rights through the unions, challenging the presentation (or lack of it) of gays in the curriculum." Register in advance (£1.50 students; 50p non-earners) with Gays in Education, Basement Flat, 23 Belitha Villa, London N1 (01-857 3793).

Children: Future Labour Force - Future Labour Movement
13 November. Tyneside Socialist Centre meeting 7.30 as above. "Children are moulded to fit the system, by home and by school. Is there any way that we can protect our kids from this conditioning - and what would we replace it with?" Speakers Brian Haddow (ex-Tynedale School), and two women from Leeds involved in alternative ways of childcare.

Equality and Legal Rights
15 November. South Westminster CP discussion meeting on the position of women. 8.00 at 31A Carlisle Mansions (Basement), Carlisle Place, London SW1. Speaker Tessa Woodcraft (women's researcher, NALGO).

Marriage Breakdown, Housing and the Law
18 November. Conference 10.00-4.30 at 'New' Longsight Library, Stockport Rd, Manchester 12. Talks by lawyers and housing experts followed by workshops on injunctions, local authority housing in Manchester and Housing Act, housing finance, legal remedies, Women's Aid refuges, and a plenary session on central and local government policies. Organised by Manchester Law Centre, NW Association of Housing Aid, and NW Women's Aid Federation. Register by 31 October (free for claimants, £1.50 for individuals, £2.50 for solicitors, local authority and housing association workers) with Wendy Pettifer, Manchester Law Centre, 595 Stockport Rd, Longsight, Manchester 13. For creche contact Wendy or Carol Ann at 061-225 5111.

Women and Education
22 November. Discussion meeting 8.00 at 10 Barkers Lane, Sale. Topic: basic skills. Details from 061-973 7624.

CAMPAIGNS

Abortion
NAC needs help - URGENT
"The National Abortion Campaign is facing a cash crisis. A year

with no restrictive Bill to fight has given us little opportunity to raise funds. We need donations urgently for our office and worker, and to keep the campaign going in readiness for the next attack from the anti-abortionists. If you want to support NAC please send donations to NAC, 374 Gray's Inn Rd, London WC1.

Teacher/Pupil Education Pack
SE London NAC are preparing a teacher/pupil pack on abortion for use in schools. They want information, ideas and contributions from individuals and groups who have undertaken a similar project. Particularly useful are contributions from teachers who have had experience of teaching about abortion. Contact SELN, 19 Southbourn Gdns, London SE12 (01-852 1903).

Leicester NAC Offensive
4 November. Demonstration assembling 2.00 at Victoria Park, Leicester. Themes: out-patient abortion now, free abortion on demand, a woman's right to choose. Details from Chris Goodwin (Leicester 546878).

PROJECTS

Blood Money
"Imagine menstruating in a crowded refugee camp in the heat of the African bush without adequate washing facilities. Several thousand women, refugees from South African racial oppression, are in this position. They desperately need sanitary tampons but funds are low and males in the organisation don't see this as a priority. Barnet Anti-Apartheid Group have undertaken, to raise money to meet this urgent need. Donations to Ms J. Feldman, 66 Hadley Rd, New Barnet, Herts."

Women and Housing
"The Women and Housing Group is made up of about fifteen women who initially came together to discuss holding a workshop on women and housing at this year's Shelter conference in July. The workshop happened and the group has decided to continue meeting to try to raise, within a feminist perspective, housing issues which relate specially to women. We are involved in a variety of other groups, including Women's Aid, Seagull Housing Co-op (which is women only), Homeless Action (the organisation which provides hostel accommodation for homeless women), After Six Housing Advisory Service, Lambeth Law Centre and Shelter Housing Aid Centre. We do, however, welcome any women who are interested; we can be contacted c/o Homeless Action, 374 Grays Inn Road, WC1."

Women's Arts Alliance
The WAA is looking for teachers for the Tai Chi and Yoga workshops. There's also a massage workshop starting. Details from Peg (01-272 5134).

Photography/Visual Arts Group
This women's group in Brighton has just started. Ideas for the future include sharing skills, projects, discussing 'radical' imagery

and power of pictures. Details from Diane Ceresa, 37 St Nicholas Rd, Brighton.

CENTRES

Milton Keynes Women's Advice Centre

"Milton Keynes Women's Group is starting a Women's Advice Centre, which we hope will be open one day a week, and will provide advice and support to women in the area on a wide range of problems, including sex counselling and pregnancy advice." They need women with special skills in any subjects, specifically those with legal experience, involved in medicine, obstetrics and gynaecology. Contact the group at 46 Calvards Croft, Greenleys, Milton Keynes, MK12 6AP (0908-316592).

Lesbian Line

The telephone service for lesbians has a new number: 01-837 8602 (Mon and Fri 2.00-10.00, Tue, Wed, Thur 7.00-10.00). You can still write to them at BM Box 1514, London WC1.

Coventry Rape Crisis Centre

"We would like to hear how other centres got their finance, property, workers, and about local councils' attitudes towards them." Contact them c/o 13 High St, Coventry (Judith or Jackie Coventry 25634)

Women's Centre Jamboree

29 October. 11.00-8.00 at 74 Deptford High St, London SE8. Day of discussion with exhibitions, bookstall and the film *Take it like a man, ma'am*. Workshops on achievements and aims of the women's centre, political action, funding, charitable status, paid workers... Food and drink available. Entrance free. Contact the centre (01-692 1851) Tue, Wed, Fri 11.00-4.00 if you want to help, need information, have suggestions for workshops.

FUN AND MUSIC

* Stand Together

Second Hackney and Islington Music Workshop songbook. "The songs, like in the first songbook, are chosen from a number of different styles and traditions. We don't feel that any one kind of music is the right/only kind of socialist music - whether it's Punk, or Reggae, or whatever. We've taken and often adapted or rewritten songs from old broadsheets and songbooks, contemporary socialist/feminist plays, from the pop charts and the folk clubs. What matters is the adaptation and transformation of these elements into a living culture that is part of our struggle. £1+ postage. Information from 2A St Pauls Rd, London N1 (01-226 0580).

Oadby and Wigston Women's Aid Social

21 October. Fundraising evening 8.00 at 15 Purbeck Close, Wigston, Leicester. New members welcome.

Meet Gemma

25 October. Social and fundraising evening 8.00-10.00 at

Caldwell St Day Centre, Caldwell St, London SW9. Tea, coffee, wine available. Entrance 20p.

NAC Benefit

28 October. From 8.00 at Waterloo Action Centre, Baylis Rd, London SE1. Women only.



Lesbian Line Disco/Party

3 November. From 8.00 at Waterloo Action Centre as above. Free first drink to anyone in fancy dress. Food and drink available. Entrance £1 (50p claimants). Women only.

PLAYS AND FILMS

Harlan County USA

Film about a miners' strike for union recognition. It "concentrates on the barbarity and inhumanity of the mineowners and operators and on the crucial and supportive role of the miners' wives in the strike" (SR 72).

1 November. 8.00 at the Leeds Trade Club.

3 November. 7.00 at Leeds University.

Feminist Theatre Workers Week of Action

23-29 October. Action against sexist stereotyping in current West End and fringe theatre. There will be pickets after shows every night. Details of where to meet etc. from Sue 01-727 6677 (evenings only; ask for top flat).

Belisha Beacon

Those of us who laughed so much at *Bouncing Back with Benyon* (SR 59) will have been waiting somewhat impatiently for the next play to be written by those two very talented writers Eileen Fairweather and Melissa Murray. *Belisha Beacon* will not disappoint you... I was lucky enough to have been given the script, and if anything can make me laugh while reading on the tube early in the morning, it shows enormous skill.

While *Bouncing Back* dealt with the Benyon anti-abortionists this new play discusses, at length and without holding anything back, women's sexuality. A subject of constant discussion throughout the movement which can well do with an airing on stage I think. Eileen and Melissa have a knack of writing lines which make you think and laugh at the same time and this has been given full reign again - so watch for this play.

Carole Spedding

27/28 October. At the Women

and Culture season, Nottingham.

29 October-1 November. Prospective tour in the East Midlands.

3-11 November. Greater London area.

10-12 and 24-26 November. The Oval House, Kennington Oval, London SE11.

2 December. Liverpool Liberty Hall.

3-9 December. Nuffield Theatre Studio (not yet confirmed).

Bookings and details from Debra Hauer 01-836 1477 or Eileen Fairweather 01-263 2347.

PUBLICATIONS

Working on Wife Abuse

A directory of refuges, other services and individuals working on wife abuse in the US and abroad. It includes publications, films, information on funding, articles on why refuges are necessary, advice in running refuges and a critique of other options such as marriage guidance. A comprehensive guide, particularly the US listings which are by State. A must for anyone interested in comparing developments and seeking contact with movement oriented women's aid in the States. Available from Betsy Warrior, 46 Pleasant St, Cambridge Ma 02139 USA. \$3 + postage.

Jalna Hamner

WIN

In 1976 feminists active in women's aid and rape action groups met to find ways to build unity. WIN is the resulting joint publication. Its purpose is to generate a national network and to facilitate dialogue between feminists working to eliminate violence against women. The first issue contains movement news, current campaigns on behalf of individual women, discussions about the relationship between rape and racism and racism and refuges, relevant legislative activity, book reviews etc. Again a must for feminists wanting to know what is happening in the States. Available from FAAR, PO Box 21033, Washington DC 20009. \$8.75 bimonthly.

Jalna Hamner

The National Women's Aid Federation have done an overview of the literature available on battered women and refuges.

* The existing research into Battered Women

This booklet criticises the way that much of the research on battered women has been done, in particular the work of Jasper Gayford. His conclusions are criticised for the way he conducted his research (making generalisations from a small self-selected group of women); and for the values he brought to them (there are 10 types of battered women such as "Fanny the Flirt" and "Go-go Gloria"). 20p.

* Women you don't have to put up with being Battered - How to get an Injunction

A step-by-step guide to enable women to get an injunction without a solicitor. It deals with both emergency and less urgent situations. Clear and easy to follow. 40p.

Information Kit for Agencies

A collection of leaflets: on the structure and aims of the National Women's Aid Federation, what refuges are like, NAWF's understanding of battering, and the myths about battered women, as well as a leaflet directed at specific agencies eg doctors, explaining how they can help battered women. 20p.

Information Kit for setting up and running Refuges

A collection of information on the practical side of setting up and running a refuge such as publicity, funding etc, on the feminist aims of NAWF, and ideas on a feminist understanding of the battering of women. Also a section on education about Women's Aid and battered women. 50p.

* Battered Women, Refuges and Women's Aid

A booklet with a section on why women come to refuges; living and working in refuges; the way refuges are run differently from other 'hostels'; the law; all within the general political perspective of the National Women's Aid Federation. 60p.

* It's just a Personal Problem? The Myth about Battered Women

"They ask for it", "if it was so bad they would leave". These and other such deep-rooted myths are broken down in this booklet, which also presents alternative ways of understanding battering by looking at society in general, instead of at individual men and women, or families in isolation. 20p.

* Half the Sky and still no Roof - Battered Women are Homeless

A report on the workings of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act Dec '77. Already by May 1978 it was clear that local authorities were evading their responsibilities to battered women. This is due to both a general lack of housing resources and in particular to attitudes to the rights of battered women to housing. The report demands the right of every person to a decent home. 30p.

* A Refuge for Battered Women - A Study of the Role of a Women's Centre

By Jan Pahl. The only detailed, descriptive account of the daily life of a refuge - the problems faced by battered women dealing with social services, the police, doctors, social security etc; and the advantages and problems of the way the refuge is run, without anyone in charge, attempting to share the responsibility equally between all the women living in the refuge and those in the support group. The conclusions are limited by the small-scale nature of the study. £1.75.

The first seven publications are available from NAWF, 374 Grays Inn Rd, London WC1 (01-837 9316). Please send 30p postage and packing for the kit for setting up and running refuges; 15p for one of the other publications plus 5p for each additional item. Jan Pahl's study can be obtained from HMSO, 49 High Holborn, London WC1.

* Available from PDC, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1. Add 15p postage.



Part Three: THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S AID

We began our series of articles on the US women's movement with Ann Scott's impressions of Boston (SR 74). Last month Linda Gordon spoke about feminist history.

Betsy Warrior has been active in the women's movement in Cambridge, Massachusetts since 1968. She married at 17 and left her husband seven years later to live alone with her daughter. She started to find out about radical politics, evolving an anarchist position, renamed herself after a Native American militant, and joined one of the first radical feminist groups, Cell 16. Her 1974 article "Battered Lives" helped to start a movement for women's aid inspired by ours in Britain. Once started, US women's refuges have spread fast. Over the last two years Working on Wife Abuse, Betsy Warrior's comprehensive directory to refuges across the world, has already run through six editions and is usually out of date even as it reaches publication.

An impressive number of American refuges are staffed by women who have been battered themselves. Transition House in Cambridge was one of the first of these, started in the apartment of Cheri Jimenez and Chris Womendez, two women on welfare with firsthand experience of male violence.

Amanda Sebestyen spoke to Betsy Warrior earlier this year.

Betsy: If Chris and Cheri hadn't taken that initial step of opening up their apartment, things would have taken much longer. Because if you want to do things the respectable way, there's always so much you can't do —

. You can't get a licence for this, you can't do that, and if you always wait for a legal way you don't have the money for a lawyer.

Amanda: *How did you manage to pay for the refuge? I know you can't squat in the States.*

At first Cheri and Chris paid the rent out of their welfare cheque. Then at the end of that first year we moved into a bigger house, and rented it together. We got donations from people; we wrote out these hundreds of letters, mimeographed, saying that we would like to set up a refuge for battered women, was there any way they could help us, we would be really grateful if you could just pledge us that you would always send us one dollar a month. We sent out this letter to about eighty people who we knew had some interest in the women's community, or in liberal causes or something, and we wound up getting 350 dollars a month in pledges of everything from one dollar. Some women sent in things like their WIP coupons.

What's that?

Really poor women get food coupons if they have infants, for juice and milk. One young woman was breastfeeding her baby, so she sent us her WIP coupons. She said that she'd like to do more but she was really poor, she'd got married and she had a baby when she was 14, and she was trying to work and go to school now, and if she could send us more she would. We got things like crumpled up one dollar bills from welfare mothers. But we wound up getting an assured income of at least 300 dollars a month, and our rent was 375 so we almost covered our rent completely.

Did you get any big donations?

Well, all of our support came from the poorer section of the community, from women that is. There were women that I

personally know, like one who now is considered by other women to be probably well-off. She came from a family of 13 kids and she was the youngest and she worked her way through high school and through nurses' college and now she has a professional job, and all of the money that she saves up she puts right back into the women's movement. She started off contributing 500 dollars to Transition House, and contributes every month part of her salary. She's well off in comparison to some women, but in comparison to men she's nothing, she's small potatoes, you know. But it's people like this, living in the women's community mostly, that started giving us things like old furniture, old clothing. And we would make certain demands like the furniture they sent us was repaired, and the clothing they sent us was clean, because if it wasn't we'd only wind up with all this junk on our hands to throw away. But when we were first doing the house we were much more gullible and wishy washy.

You mean with some of the people that came into your office?

Yeah. And what happened was that some women would rip off the house and take advantage and expect everybody else to take care of their kids, not clean up after themselves, etc., and they drove all the women away that were really serious about wanting to get back on their feet. So after a certain point we just said to them: "Hey, listen, there's nobody around here that's going to be your maid or your servant."

By now we've worked out some guidelines, and one of us goes through the welcome sheet with each new woman who comes into the house, to explain what is expected — because when you come into a refuge you're escaping with your life and you don't know what you've got, what you left behind, whether he'll know where you are, whatever You're really emotionally upset. So we have to go over things with the woman and make sure that she realises what she's saying and what she can expect from us by way of help. She's expected to do house work, and we'll try to give her as much childcare as possible — five days a week, five or six hours a

day — but she is ultimately responsible for her children, keeping them clean and healthy. But we will do what we can.

From the Welcome Sheet of Transition House

We receive no federal or state money but are funded through private foundations and individual contributions. We try to keep the house and hotline staffed 24 hours a day. Besides shelter, there are legal, medical, welfare, education, and other referrals. Please feel free to ask questions. If we don't have the answers, we'll try to find them. There are many reference books in the office that you should feel free to use at any time.

The length of stay is four weeks for women without children and six weeks for women with children. Hopefully, this is enough time to allow you to get a new apartment, get financial assistance, or find a job. By using legal procedures like "vacate and trespass orders", some women are able to return to their homes after their spouse has been removed.

I see there's a small charge for food here.

Right. Most of the women don't have any money at all when they come in. Some of them have jobs and some have food stamps, which are part of the welfare programme. They don't have to pay anything until they get some income and then they can pay, retroactively, and it's a very small charge, about what you would pay for a quarter of the rent. There's no way we could buy a dozen women and a dozen kids food — we don't have the funding, we're not that rich. In fact when the shelter first opened I often used to steal things from the school where I worked as a janitor, they would have cookies and trashbags and salt and stuff and I would steal them and take them over to Transition House.

Does the refuge still have any problems?

Well, some of the people that come in to staff the shelters from the women's movement tend to be much more wishy washy because they're afraid to be thought condescending or authoritarian. As an ex-battered woman, I haven't had any problems saying if I don't like something, feeling close to the other women too That's the good thing about ex-residenciers, they can be much more honest and direct because they have been through the same thing.

So far only a few refuges in Britain are run by women who've been battered themselves; that's an advantage we don't often have.

But in other ways probably the English movement is just as good; because I think the American movement will get corrupted a lot faster, throwing all the money around and with all these big professionals who want a job when unemployment is so high.

I have heard from groups and individual women in many parts of the country, who, on the brink of establishing their programmes for battered women, or having just received funding, find their work coming to a standstill through the interference of traditional institutions, government agencies or professionals. Though these agencies have shown little or no concern for the battered woman in the past, the smell of money is an overpowering incentive for them. Often they step in after all the hardest work is done and attempt to place their people in positions of control.

Another tactic is to obtain thousands of dollars in funding to do a "study" to see if the problem exists or if a shelter is needed. If this money was simply used for a refuge, evidence of the need would be quickly demonstrated through the use of the facility.

Other 'professional' responses to the growth of feminist refuges have included sociological papers with titles like *Battered Husbands — victims of the 'Angry Women Syndrome'*; and *government-funded refuges which see violence as a 'problem in personal relationships' and try to repair the marriage — this of course involves putting a battering husband back in contact with his wife:*

For safety reasons the address of the house is never disclosed. You can use the women's centre as a mailing address instead, and all of your mail will be picked up for you there. No one is to be given the shelter address. Arrangements have been made with the welfare department to have "home visits" take place at the women's centre. For legal use, you can give your old address or the women's centre's. Don't meet friends or relatives on this street or let them drop you off here. A restaurant or the women's centre is more appropriate. Be careful when giving out the phone number upstairs. If you must talk to a violent man for business purposes, please use an outside phone.

Marriage counselling and other "options"

If a shelter, under the pretence of being "neutral", offers battered women the "option" of patching up their marriage (going back to the battering situation) through marriage counselling, mediation, etc., they are undermining her decision, her confidence in it, and her confidence to make and carry through decisions. She has already rejected the option of being battered by coming to the shelter. When a woman calls the centre for help and



Picture by Cheri Jimenez from *Working on Wife Abuse*

expresses strong misgivings and hesitancy about leaving her husband, the time probably isn't right for her to take this step. The worker can instead suggest that the woman attend a support group.

At the support group the battered woman can discuss and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of her situation and give some time and thought to the direction she wants her future to take. The support group should also help to foster a woman's self-esteem and independence to prepare her for leaving a battering situation.

Guidelines for the group

For battered women only. No observers.

People should not criticise or be disapproving of how a woman has handled her situation, but offer support and suggestions for alternatives that will be more constructive and helpful in the long run.

Define the problem. Don't get bogged down in individual details too long without relating it back to other women in a social context—how all women are socialised and battered (or discriminated against in different ways), how we can deal with this more effectively or change the situation. Each woman must know that she individually is not to blame for her battering, but instead understand the circumstances that are making it hard for her to struggle against it.

Information about Transition House from *Working on Wife Abuse*

I've felt the women's movement was hitting a bad patch over the last few years, but just recently we've been coming out of it in England and been having some grass roots actions around abortion and rape.

Well, over here about 1975 there was a sort of lull too, but that's not to say the women's movement wasn't alive and doing a lot of work. The whole time it's doing a lot of work; there's a lot of undercurrents, a lot of working down at women's centres, just a lot of basic grassroots work that's being done that never gets publicised. People who aren't basically sympathetic to the women's movement prefer to say that it's dead or is dying when this kind of work is going on.

And over the past couple of years there's been a real resurgence in the women's movement; it started probably with the activity against rape. Then a lot of publicity began to be focussed on the issue of battered women. And in 1976 about 10,000 people turned out for a march, "Women Support Women" around the two issues of battering and women as houseworkers — they were both linked together, battering is the occupational hazard of the houseworker. And those issues connect with rape and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Then in this particular location there's a group called Coalition Against Institutionalised Violence, against a lock-up unit that's being built for so-called violent women which is going to have really tight security. Women that aren't satisfied with things in prison and have given the authorities a lot of trouble — they'll just knock them out and shoot them up with drugs and put them in straightjackets. All these issues converged in 1976.

When did the campaign against sexual harassment at work begin?

It's been going for about a year now, there are chapters all over the country. And there's another component of this whole thing, Women Against Violence Against Women, who are fighting pornography and violence in the media, on album covers and in cartoons, newspapers, billboards. They have chapters all over the country too, and they use economic boycotts against record companies, against deodorants, make-up, whatever. All of these different trends are based on violence against women — rape, battering, pornography, sexual harassment at the workplace; and there's a sub-issue of prisons and women who are imprisoned for defending themselves by killing the battering husband, children that are being molested and are victims of incest.

So in the last couple of years there's been a real resurgence of that International Women's Day march. It used to be pretty bad because the weather was usually terribly cold and windy and only a few more Left-type women would be there, but this year hundreds of women showed up to protest about the lock-up.

LESBIANS • SUPPORT WORKING WOMEN • SUPPORT THE DEFENSE OF BATTERED WOMEN • SUPPORT WOMEN BREAKING OUT OF PRISON AND MENTAL INSTITUTIONS • SUPPORT WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

WOMEN

WOMEN'S DAY MARCH

RALLY AT GOVERNMENT CENTER 1 PM

GATHER AT PARK ST. STATION THURS AUG 26 12 NOON

SPONSORED BY: CAMBRIDGE WOMEN'S CENTER, TRANSITION HOUSE, BOSTON NOW

SUPPORT



BRING AN UMBRELLA IF IT RAINS

WOMEN

SUPPORT THIRD WORLD WOMEN • SUPPORT MEDICAL SELF-HELP FOR WOMEN • SUPPORT FREE ABORTION • SUPPORT FREE DAY-CARE

Poster by Betsy Warrior

I was just thinking back to the 19th century, the campaign that united middle class women and working class women as the defence of prostitutes, and what the abolitionist women felt in common with the slave women was prostitution. It's so urgent and so stark.

But now it's more violence against women —

But that spreads to the prostitutes too, we get many ex-prostitutes coming to our shelters and they're some of the best workers that we get too. The economic exploitation of prostitution, it's really men's way of forcing us to serve them sexually by cutting off every other economic option. That's violence against women, in an economic way, but so is housework — that's economic violence against women, it's slavery — we're forced to work for no wage. And that's why men can beat us. I've never heard of anybody else getting beaten — stockboys or office workers or anybody getting beaten by their bosses except housewives.

I started working on the housework analysis in 1969. As I made cultural and historical comparisons, it seemed more and more reasonable to me to equate the unpaid labour of women with slavery. Many of the side effects of slavery for other groups also held true for women. Not only obvious and superficial ones like taking on the master's name, but lack of representation in governing bodies, restraint on freedom of movement, exclusion from certain occupations and professions, rapes and beatings etc. Males who have been subjected to closely parallel positions have always been labelled slaves, serfs or chattels. Why not women? Gradually, it appeared to me that the concept of wages for housework was tantamount to the abolition of slavery.

Though I had been a housewife myself for years and knew many other housewives, I decided to draw up a questionnaire on the subject and bring it around to housewives in a working class district to test the climate a little more. Then in 1970 I wrote "Slavery or a Labour of Love" for *A Journal of Female Liberation*. It was reprinted in a few other places.

But I was disappointed at the response these ideas received in the women's movement. Women seemed to receive the ideas favorably (except for male left women) but without seeing much importance in them. Men reacted with incredible hostility.

By 1973 a friend had also become interested in wages for housework. We decided to do some consciousness-raising through leafletting and publicity. Our leaflet grew longer and longer till in 1974 we decided to publish a book instead, *The Houseworker's Handbook*. Though our distribution has been poor due to lack of connections, publicity and money, we have managed to distribute thousands.

Of course there are now many other groups working on the issue along their own lines. I found Christine Delphy's article about housework, *The Main Enemy*, excellent — though she did not ask for a wage. On the other hand, I have disagreements with some of the "Wages for Housework" groups. We've hardly scratched the surface on the issue yet and much work remains to be done.

Letter from Betsy Warrior

So it's reaching out in different ways, the women's movement, right now. It's reaching out through the refuges to women who've never had any contact with the women's movement before. The residents never knew anything about the women's movement and always had this idea of it that they got through media that we were a terrible bunch of fanatics, and when they come into the refuges they see what the women's movement is all about and they make friends, lifelong friends, and a lot of them become involved in ways that make them become feminists themselves and start working for the refuge or in other areas to better women's position. And then we get a lot of staffers that have always wanted to find a way to work in the women's movement, but they just never knew exactly how to approach it, what they could do, and when the issue of battered women is raised they see it as a real urgent need, as something that they can be proud of and be really useful and practical.

The basis of our shelter is self-help and self-reliance in a supportive women's community. We work to support and encourage a woman in her decisions as she moves towards a more independent life. When you leave us, we hope your interest in the house will not end. We would like you to be a continuing part of the shelter by sharing the experience and knowledge you have gained in successfully dealing with your situation. This can be done by returning to staff, helping with community outreach programs, and many other ways. We have support groups run by ex-battered women for women in crisis, and support groups for women who have gone through the shelter.

From the welcome sheet for Transition House

I met a woman in Washington who was involved with lobbying and forming big coalitions which were often not radical but would unite to back women's issues through Senate and Congress. For them, the biggest feminist issue right now was not so much violence as sexual harassment on the job.

Well, I think battered women are in a more desperate situation, so that people feel more urgency to become involved. But sexual harassment in the workplace, that is all over the place and almost everybody suffers from that, whether you're married or not.

I don't know any single person who hasn't at some time or other. You know, I used to like work in a factory, because

even though I got sick it's the one place in my life where — (Amazed) You didn't get harassed sexually? Oh my god, every factory I've worked in

Well, the supervisors were women in the factory I was at. The supervisors are women. You're lucky. The organiser, everybody, they try to snatch you by the ass. I thought going back later here am I, an old woman, practically, in my thirties, that nobody would bother me any more, and I'd be treated with a little bit of respect. Oh I got a surprise. The union organiser tried to grab me. I couldn't believe —

..... there were hardly any men in mine. Every other job I've had up till now I've been in trouble for not being charming and not looking tidy enough and in the factory at least they don't care. Every other job I've been in from really low down clerical work upwards, you've always got some guy that you've got to smile up to.

Yeah. You have a higher standard, I think, in clerical work. My mother and sisters worked in offices, and even though they would make a higher salary they'd have to spend practically all of it on buying fancy shoes, fancy skirts, fancy dresses, and they were expected to look just right, and my God, the money that they put into buying clothes. If I was supplied with a uniform, which I was at the different factories and the gas station, that wasn't such a big chunk out of my salary. My salary wouldn't have to go back into buying clothes. But their salary — and it was considered *their* clothes, they weren't buying them just for the job because after my mother retired she had enough clothes to last her 25 years, she wasn't buying any more clothes after that. You really do spend a lot on clothes in clerical work.

The worst things for me were those jobs that I was getting because I had a degree and I was supposed to be an assistant to somebody. And they were basically just prostitution. I know people who lost jobs like that hundreds of times because they wouldn't sleep with the guy. And I didn't really suss out what was happening, until just after I was in the women's movement I began to get more and more desperate that I should have a job and I was offered this job in a graphics workshop and I just spent the whole day being chased by this guy with halitosis! But I amaze myself. I mean nobody'd do that to me now, thank god!

But if you have to live you have to eat. If you go and lose your job you're not going to eat because you haven't got the job, and I think that's why a lot of people that always had to just survive, they buckle down, they do it, they put on a different face, they act dumb, they go along with it, just to live.

Right now in England in Grunwicks factory, where they've had a big strike, the younger Asian women have to go out with the foremen or they lose their increments. It's a really 19th century situation.

Oh, of course. It hasn't changed a bit. You said you'd read that book, *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair — about the meat factory? Well I was only working in a meat factory five years ago, and it's exactly the same except for sanitary conditions —

And it's just as bad for the workers?

Oh, it's worse for the workers, because they hire these efficiency experts to come in and squeeze every drop of energy out of you by the time you're finished. Some people only last a few months or a few years and then their health is ruined. I've seen 17 year old girls coming in and they have these tics in their faces, one girl they used to call Rabbit because her nose always twitched. And that's from working on the belt, after a few months working on the belt, your muscles just start jumping. At work I learned after a while not to expose myself, not to make myself so vulnerable because I used to always get angry and react whenever they

would say things about women, like the foreman I had at the meat factory, he always used to say 'Oh Betsy, I would like to see you cows working, get going' and 'I wish I had a whip to make these cattle move a little faster', talking right behind me in my ear on the line when I'm working on the assembly belt. And I would get so furious my face would turn red and I'd turn around and say "You pig", or something like that, and he loved that, that's why he said it. And it was too late when I caught on. Then they would love to say everything around me that they could; they wouldn't bother the other women half as much as me, so I learned pretty much to hide what I believed in, to hide what I felt and thought and not react. Let them say any kind of insult, and pretend that I didn't hear.

I remember at the janitor job I worked, the old guy I worked with would always keep saying, "You know Betsy, women shouldn't get paid as much as men because men have to support their families," and I would say, "Listen, Sam, I never saw a man pregnant yet, what are you talking about their families. Your wife worked hard all her life, now she's retired and she has to take care of you, so you have to get out of the way" — his wife was glad to get him out of the house, he was in his seventies, but she couldn't stand to have him around all day. And he would get in these big arguments with me and I dunno why I ever reacted to him. I should have known by then just to shut up and say, "Yes, Sam, you're right". Here I am, working and supporting my kid, and he's telling me women should get paid less because men have families! It used to get me so mad that I'd react, and then after I was angry with him one day the boss walked in and this guy said, "Oh, Betsy's getting married," and the boss said, "Oh yeah?" and he said, "Of course she's marrying a woman; she'd never marry a man." Just out of the blue. They harass you in all these sneaky little underground ways.

It's really difficult to defend yourself against something like that. The same thing happened in the factory that I was at, people kept making these anti-gay remarks and if I'd been living with a woman it'd have been easier for me to say: "this is what I want to do and there's plenty of people doing it here anyway," which was quite obvious. But in fact I didn't know what to do because I wasn't sleeping with anyone, man or woman. Actually around that time a group of us who were celibate in the movement started a consciousness raising group because we felt so persecuted!

I can't even take that much interest in sex or the lack of it to go to a group. I don't want to put energy into that part of life. I've found that mostly working class women and minority women don't consider sexual liberation that important, sexual or lesbian or celibate or whatever — because they've known degradation in their lives in other ways, job discrimination and violence. Sex is just another duty to their whole list of: working in the factory, coming home and washing the dishes they're so goddam tired and want to go to bed, they're not worried about fucking or getting any sexual satisfaction.

And yet it's a trap, because if you don't fight to get sexual liberation then you're going to be constantly harassed for the sex and in a way that's insulting and humiliating too.

But I've got enough problems; that's the way I always feel, you know, I've got enough problems, without that too. I have all of these other things I would really like to put my energy into, and I really don't have enough energy to do any of them justice anyway, so I'm sort of hoarding my energy, to use it in ways that I'll feel more rewarded. I'm spending an awful lot of time doing *The Houseworkers' Handbook*, and the Directory and other related material, and a couple of posters, and then doing a support group at Transition House. That's all I have time for, it seems. I would like to have time to do more things, like painting, talking to my cat and stuff like that. ■



Working on Wife Abuse is reviewed in *Shortlist*.

Also available from the same address: *The Houseworker's Handbook*, and posters by Betsy Warrior including 'Women Support Women', 'Strike While the Iron is Hot — Wages for Housework' and 'For Shelter and Beyond' with a poem written by Marge Piercy for the 1976 Women's Day March.

Betsy Warrior's poster 'Disarm Rapists — Smash Sexism' is available from A Woman's Place, 42 Earlham Street, London WC2.



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CLASSIFIED

groups

Note: New reduced classified ad rates for sisters looking for or starting local women's liberation groups. 5p/word; 7p/capitals; 30p box numbers.

■ **FEMINIST READING GROUP** forming to read together and discuss basic feminist liberationist material. Phone Standlake 800.

■ **DOVER:** struggling group trying to start evening class in Women's Studies. Contact Pam, Dover 208367 (evenings)

■ **CYCLISTS** — I want to start a lesbian feminist cycling group for cycling, maintenance, discussion etc. Phone 888 9293 after 7pm, top flat.

■ **SOCIALIST FEMINIST** motorcyclist desperate to join women's group in Oxford area. Phone Judy, Charlbury 202.

■ **Gay Feminists SE London** interested in forming a group. Penny 692 5058.

■ **ERDINGTON (BIRMINGHAM) WOMENS GROUP** wants more women. Contact Karen 382 4729.

■ **Foreign girl, 21,** wishes to contact consciousness raising group. Alexandra, 6 Windsor Mansions, Luxborough St, W1.

■ **British Student in N. Delhi** seeks women's group. Are there any? Jude Howell, B112, Sarvodaya Enclave, 14, N. Delhi 110017

■ **CHISWICK area.** Any women interested in forming a new (C.R.) group please phone Sandy 994 3324.

■ **MORE WOMEN NEEDED FOR ISLINGTON C.R. GROUP.** TEL JILL 226 2160 (EVES)

■ **MEN'S group** being formed in Balham/Clapham/Tooting area. Phone Misha Wolf 673 0091.

■ **Woman wanted to teach motor cycle maintenance.** Contact Bike Group c/o WAA 01 935 1841.

contacts

■ **FRENCH S.R. reader, 28,** seeks English woman for feminist correspond. Write Joelle VERGER 11 Boulevard Gambetta, 76000 Rouen.

■ **Feminist with new baby** seeks similar N1 area for sharing childcare/support. Ruth 607 4623

■ **30 yr gay girl** nurse seeks mature professional lady for sincere friendship and company. Walsall/Birmingham Box 773

■ **Woman, 31, non-drinking** alcoholic wishes to hear from similar S.R. readers, share experiences, ideas, support. Box 774.

therapy/growth

■ **THE AQUARIAN WOMAN** — A practical guide to the basic emotional and physical uniqueness of woman using the techniques of yoga, massage and movement relaxation. Tuesdays 7pm, 30 King Edwards Gardens W3. 992 5128

■ **Woman psychotherapist** (Jungian) Tel 348 5593 preferably before 10.00am.

■ **Meditation** can give you the courage to change what needs to be changed, the strength to accept what can't be, and the insight to distinguish between the two. To find out more about the British Meditation Society come to a talk at Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, NW1 (opp. Euston station), every Wednesday at 7.30pm, or contact the National Office, 51, Aldridge Road Villas, London W11. Tel 01 229 8912

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■ **PART TIME LONDON CORRESPONDENT/SUB** required for small progressive Third World news agency. Mon-Sat (half day Sat), alternate weeks. Salary £188+ per month (gross). Knowledge of Spanish useful but not essential. Membership of NUJ or willingness to join condition of employment. Write to Inter Press Service, Greenhill House, 90-93 Cowcross St, London EC1M 6BH.

■ **BRISTOL FILM-MAKERS COOPERATIVE.** Person experienced in film-making wanted to coordinate running of workshop and give instruction in use and care of equipment. £3000 p.a. Further details from Janet Shearer, 4 Durdham Park, Bristol 6. Closing Date 30th October.

Could you work with pensioners?
Kensington & Chelsea Task Force are looking for three dynamic new people to complete a collective of four. Two posts are permanent, one is temporary (maternity leave). Driving licence an advantage. Salary £3375 (review in October). For job description phone 01-969 9105/6 or write Task Force, 11 Acklam Road, London W10.

■ **Established community printing co-op** needs committed full-time worker. Details from Paupers' Press, 87 Bullingdon Road, Oxford.

■ **CONCRETE AND POETRY.** Great Georges Community Cultural Project offers hard and interesting work to women/men. Opportunities to learn construction skills alongside experienced builders, and to work on our cultural programme (games; sound + other workshops; events), and to share administration, housekeeping etc. Accommodation available. Further info from GREAT GEORGES PROJECT, GREAT GEORGES ST. LIVERPOOL 1. 051-709 5109

■ **STUDENT COMMUNITY ACTION** (Manchester) needs full-time worker to start A.S.A.P. Wages low, so commitment essential! For job description etc write to Community Action, University of Manchester Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.

■ **WORKER IN COMMUNITY RIGHTS CENTRE.** Newham Rights Centre, in the East End of London, require a new worker to continue and expand their existing work in the community. No particular experience is necessary but a knowledge of the East End of London and/or experience working with local organisations in a working class community would be an advantage. There is no defined area for the new appointment but people with experience and interest in one or more of the following will be welcomed: Black Youths; the Asian Community; the Women's Movement; Unemployment problems; Community Planning and Development; and Local Tenants/Housing Groups. Newham Rights Centre works on pay parity and has an independent Management Committee. Please send details of experience and interest in areas of work to Newham Rights Centre, 309 Barking Road, East Ham, London E6. Closing date 27 October 1978.

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■ **2 women** to share house and garden, O/Rs, in Hackney, ring Della 985 9722 late evenings.

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■ **Feminist moving to London** needs place to live. Box 771.

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■ **The Archway Women's Health Group** would like to hear from women with experience of various veins describing their experience and treatment of, including any alternative methods of treatment. This would be very helpful in the compiling of a forthcoming article. Mira Radinovich, Archway Women's Health Group, 43 Savernake Road, London NW3.

■ **Would the following women** please contact Allison Fell at Spare Rib about inclusion in a Spare Rib anthology of fiction and poetry: Judy Barrington, Jamie Callan, Angela Hamblin, Eva Fitzpatrick, Joy Marston, Margaret Rodriguez, Stefanie Smolensky, Susan Wallbank and Fran Landesman.

■ **An interview with Marge Piercy** (feminist writer) was taped on low batteries. Has anyone got the equipment to unscramble it? Contact Amanda Sebestyen at Spare Rib.

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■ **Hand worked pewter jewellery,** symbols, initials to order. Details Joan Stewart, Leacklee, Harris, Western Isles.

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■ **PRINTING?** We are a women's co-op printing magazines, posters and pamphlets. Estimates and Catalogue from Mossdale Community Press, 21a Princess Road, Manchester 14. Tel 061-226 7115.

■ **'Books Plus',** 23 Lewisham Way, London SE14 buys and sells books pamphlets academic social feminist etc, new and used. Tel 464 1327 (evenings).

■ **LONDON MEN'S CENTRE** — come along any Wednesday evening from 8pm or write c/o Bread & Roses, 316 Upper Street, N1.

publications

■ **WIRES (WOMEN'S INFORMATION REFERRAL AND ENQUIRY SERVICE)** is the Women's Liberation Movement national information service, and also produces a twice-monthly newsletter. This contains news of conferences, events, meetings, campaigns, and other activities of the WLM; nationwide news, information and news from groups as well as articles on feminist art, health, international etc — plus reviews, letters and so on. Office opening times are: Monday to Friday 10.30-4.30. Write to us or telephone if you have a query and SUBSCRIBE TO WIRES: Sub rates £6 a year (£4 if poor); group rates £12 a year (£8 if poor) for 2 copies of each issue. Individual copies at 20p each. Copies are also available on a sale-or-not-pay basis. Individual copies 10p each, 32A Parliament Street, York, 0904 35471.

■ **WOMEN'S LIBERATION LITERATURE** or any books. Send sae for free booklist to: H Rutovitz, 31 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh.

■ **SAPPHO lesbian/feminist** magazine, 50p including post. Basement, 20 Dorset Square, London NW1. Meetings Tuesdays 7.30pm, Chepstow Pub, Chepstow Place, London W2.

■ **THE COMING AGE:** magazine of the Goddess religion. 35p. 40 St. John St., Oxford.

■ **CORNER HOUSE BOOK-SHOP.** 14 Endell Street, London WC2. Radical education books, pamphlets and magazines. Send 27p for catalogue.

■ **DISCOVER MATRIARCHY** through reincarnation memory. Other women's experiences plus do-it-yourself instructions. 75p from Silver Chalice, 40 St. John St., Oxford.

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■ **Women on the Move** — WEA Class Tuesdays 10am-midday. Creche. St Mary's Church Hall, Hampton, Middx. New members any time, enquiries 01-979 9232

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events

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■ **ARGENTINE EVENING** at Conway Hall, Friday 27 October 6.30. First British showing of documentary film 'Resistance leads to Victory' plus music, food and drink, to raise money for Argentine resistance, organised by the Montonero Peronist Movement; tickets £1 or 75p claimants from Box 772 or pay at the door.

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THEATRE

Seven Deadly Sins
of
Ordinary People
by Kurt Weill
and Bertolt Brecht

Could it be that I associate Kurt Weill's music that much with Lotte Lenya's voice that no other interpretation satisfies? Or was Julie Rock Follies Covington's performance of *Seven Deadly Sins* at the London Coliseum just not powerful enough...

Lenya's a myth by now, symbolising pre-Hitler Berlin as much as Brecht and Weill do. Her voice, described by one of her friends as "...one octave below laryngitis", evokes the aimless decadence of Weimar Germany, the 'lumpen' poverty and corruption, as well as the resistance against the Nazi domination.

Seven Deadly Sins, the last Brecht/Weill collaboration, was first produced in Paris



1935, when both had already fled from Germany. A bitter satire on the viciousness of capitalism, like most of their other operas, *Sins* is about right and wrong, about money and power, "It's the poor what gets the blame, it's the rich what gets the gravy..." Anna leaves Louisiana in search of fame and fortune. On the way, her idealism and desire for the pleasures in life clash with what is commonly known as 'being reasonable', which she soon realises is the road paved with money, power, security and status. Brecht literally gave her conflicting mind two bodies: Anna II, sensually dancing out her instincts, and Anna I keeping watch and singing her warnings and practical observations on how to 'get on' in life.

Weill's spiky music scattered with disturbing dissonants, the expressionistic warehouse setting complete with green girders, red lights and spraypainted sins, provided a wonderful contrast against Anna II's innocence in movement. But how frustrating not to hear Brecht—the music effectively drowned Julie's voice.

REVIEWS

I'm sure though, had the respectable Coliseum audience heard Brecht's biting libretto, it wouldn't have made a blind bit of difference to the conversation in the bar afterwards. Brecht's political theatre of the 30s has become another piece of 'culture', a period piece. It is sad to think that he aimed to shock the audience into a new awareness. **Anny Brackx**

Mary Barnes
by David Edgar

It was good to be at the first performance of *Mary Barnes* by David Edgar at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre Studio. The play was based on the book of the same name, an autobiography composed of two people's experiences in a therapeutic community: Mary and her principal therapist Joe Berke. Mary's story is the very stuff of drama, the book is subtitled *Two journeys through madness*; she chose to relive her horrifyingly repressed childhood and in this way consciously chart a different course for her adult life. Up till then she had consistently felt on the edge of breakdown. For me this was the interest of the play. Mary chose to 'go down', primal therapy was for her an instinct which she followed through according to her own dictates, free from drugs, with support, not coercion, from her therapists.

The stage as well as the politics of the play, was two tiered: upstairs Mary (beautifully played by Patti Love) is

getting on with the none too social business of growing through her childhood, while downstairs the therapists (representing Berke, R.D. Laing and Aaron Esterson) chafe over the running of the community (Kingsley Hall) and how far they can go along with Mary. There was one woman therapist who was a 'mother' to Mary, whilst Eddie (read Berke) feeds Mary with a bottle at her request and becomes her surrogate father. Mary comes through her journeys an exhibiting artist and the community, its lease ended, disperses.

There is a quote in the programme from Sheila Rowbotham which begins, "The so-called women's question is a whole people question", and ends, "The creation of a new woman of necessity demands the creation of a new man". Mary could not have re-created herself in isolation; this gathering of gurus for a while allowed those labelled 'mad' some self determination. In a sense they were new men (or new men for a time) and, with Mary pushing for it, humane change was experienced as possible.

If play-acting such a story in the theatre is worth anything then these actors did an excellent job. **Joanna Klaces**

We want to print a guide on how to book and put on plays including possible grant aid, and a list of new feminist plays. So please contact us with details of your forthcoming productions.



Period Piece

Gamut Theatre Group

There were well over 500 plays to choose from on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and a play about menstruation hardly grabbed me as the likeliest dramatic topic for an evening's entertainment. However by the end of the show I had been joyfully shoved into realising that this attitude was part of my inherent prejudice — by extension I had expected a messy and troublesome occasion.

The actors, five women and three men, worked through about an hour and a half of sketches and songs with apposite slides and recordings of older women giving their own embarrassed menstrual monologues. The series was well balanced with humour; particularly successful were the cast's hilarious interpretations of some of the more fatuous sanitary towel and tampon adverts. They managed to tackle almost every 'angle' on menstruation from both male and female points of view, no individual bogeys were spared.

They wrote the piece after improvising on their own experiences and those of the people they interviewed. Also by this method they evolved the most extraordinary visual image of the process of the menstrual cycle, using only a ball and themselves on a bare floor. I came away happy.

Joanna Klaces

Period Piece will be touring Leeds, S Yorks, and the Midlands in November and December, Liverpool in January '79, and London in February and March '79, but they are still available for bookings. Contact Annie Castledine, 21 Blakeney Place, Heslington Rd, York (0904-20480).

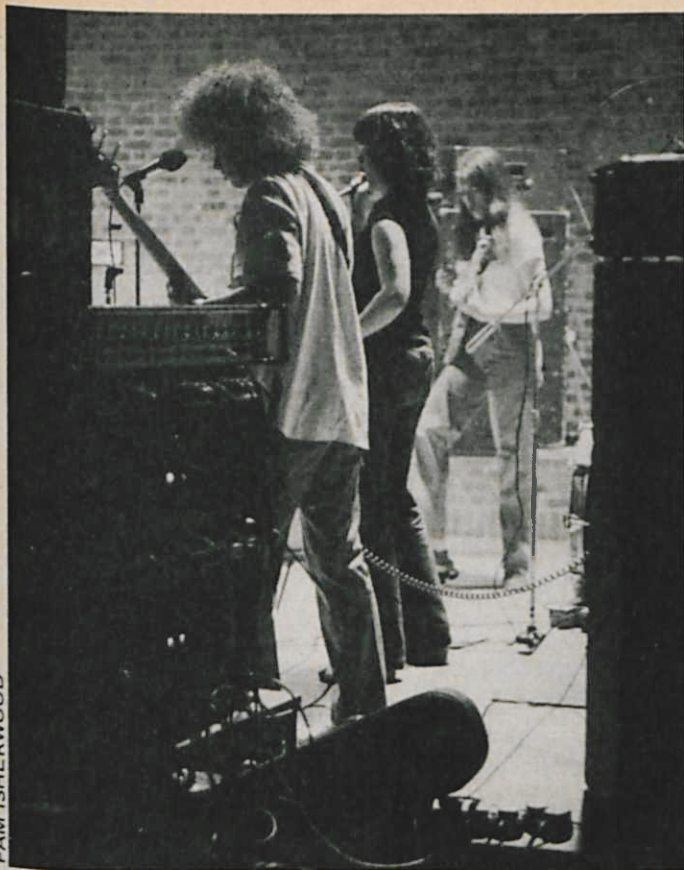
MUSIC

Get it out'cha system

Millie Jackson

(Spring/Polydor)

This new LP is Millie's usual mix of aggressive sexuality demanding satisfaction, stance of emotional honesty, bitterness at betrayal and long-drawn-out dirty jokes (see SR 68). The sleeve is doggedly vulgar with leggy pinup on one side and laboratory seat on the other ("get it out'cha system", geddit?). The structure is much the same as on *Caught Up* and *Still Caught Up*, her successful earlier albums — new numbers and older soul are folded together with talk, but this time links are only thematic, there's no actual storyline. "I am declaring my indepen-



PAM ISHERWOOD

Tour de Force playing at the 'Women on the Move' bop in London on September 16. The benefit raised £180 towards the cost of fitting out the building at Kings Cross into which the National Abortion Campaign, Lesbian Line, National Women's Aid Federation, Homeless Action and Rights of Women are moving. The four-woman band played without their usual keyboards. They usually feature original material but here they substituted rock standards for bopping's sake. They're keen to do pub, college and women's gigs and can be contacted at 01-892 9462.

Pam Isherwood

dence" she tells us — her 'right' to move on to another man. "The only thing that really matters is what I want — And I just wanna be with you". The words wouldn't irk so much if the music were better. Her voice resounds as ever, the songs are speedy and sometimes soar, but the corny backup vocals dull the edges and some of the orchestration is just too Sunday-Night-at-the-London-Palladium. As 'Sweet Music Man' winds up to a crescendo at the end of side two you can almost feel her waving, smiling and blowing kisses as she leaves the stage. To hear her at her best, stick to the *Caught Up* saga.

Jill Nicholls

Parallel Lines

Blondie

(Chrysalis)

Has Blondie compromised? Have they sold out on new wave? Reams in the music press makes you feel awfully guilty for liking the new album... and especially since Debbie Harry is being media-sold as a look-alike Marilyn/a titillating schoolgirl/the tarty girl next door.

Certainly the songs are not

raw new wave. They're still pretty chewy though, medium rare, with lots of irony in the lyrics. There's romance and reality in 'Picture This', "you'd be on the skids if it weren't for your job at the garage"; and double meanings throughout 'One Way or Another' — she's going to get him, but it turns out to be about rat-poisoning revenge, not flirtation. All the songs which Debbie Harry wrote or co-wrote have hard edges. They're pleasantly free from self-pity, and like her voice, they're active, strong and funny.

The band say they regret selling Debbie as their star — the interest in what she wears and who she loves (he's in the band) depresses them — she gets all the attention. Current press coverage makes her out to be pretty dumb — but I suspect she has it all under control:

"I was forming some say I had my chance the boys were falling like an avalanche You You baby La Dolce Vita is a magic dance no-one was listening" (from 'Pretty Baby')

Susan Hemmings

Nested

Laura Nyro

(CBS)

Laura Nyro is one of those writers whose songs are often more closely associated with others' names — who hasn't heard her but remembers 'And When I Die' by Blood Sweat and Tears or 'Wedding Bell Blues' by the 5th Dimension? Her albums of the late 60s and early 70s included a dozen such rock/pop classics. A live album, *Season of Lights* (1977) was compiled from her 1976 tour with a full band; it features reworkings of some of her 'best' songs. This live set has the usual mixture of nice surprises and disappointments that any rearrangement of sacrosanct old favourites produces.

Nyro was one of the original proponents of what's come to be seen as urban rock. City concepts were an essential source of lyrics, and were emphasized using brass. *Nested* has none of that earlier brass, or songs about cocaine and shoeshine boys. These are love songs, to men and Mother Nature. They reveal her feminist consciousness; love isn't about conquest and possession, but is a conspiracy of equals. There's a feeling of space and things growing — "mother earth are you hiding in the laughter of my innocence?". A couple of potential singles, 'My Innocence' and 'American Dreamer' ("Autumn's child is catching hell/for having been too naive to tell/property rights from chapel bells" — great stuff!) are already being played by discriminating DJs.

She has a wonderful soaring voice; my fantasy is to hear her jam with a women's band (her backup includes some women on this and other albums). When are you coming over, Laura?

PS It's pronounced Neero.

Pam Isherwood

BOOKS

The Wise Wound

by Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove

(Gollancz £7.95)

Female Cycles

by Paula Weideger

(The Women's Press

£2.50)

The Wise Wound seems misguided in both intention and practice. The sorts of insights that Shuttle and Redgrove want to offer us are really not amenable to their chosen approach. These dreams of

the Glory of the Menstruating Woman — destroyed by men's castration fears — may be the stuff of poetry (interestingly the authors are both poets) but presented as objective research they become inverted sexism and academic nonsense. Some of the images invoked are of great and moving beauty — like the womb and fallopian tubes as an antlered deer, but the book cannot be justified on this ground because it requests acceptance on quite other terms.

Certainly it is true that menstruation has been tabooed (or in the modern version of the same thing — ignored and concealed); women have been punished, put down, oppressed because of this monthly bleeding; menstruation has been willfully overlooked by male-dominated science. But I cannot believe that we will end this oppression by mystical reinterpretations of the Holy Grail legend, by radical misreadings of the contents of the bible, by distorting the facts of the mediaeval witch hunts, by creating a new myth of the Menstruating Goddess/artist, and, in general, by conglomerating a mass of highly selective facts and stringing them together elegantly. *The Wise Wound* is just such a mishmash, presented with obvious sincerity, but with a dangerous lack of political acumen, or simple common sense. There is a tendency to exalt women because of their biological function: this is no different from putting them down because of it.

It is possible to write affirmatively about the psychology and physiology of menstruation without lapsing into these rhapsodies about the real, though hidden, superiority of women. Paula Weideger has done so. *Female Cycles* is as positive, and nearly as broadly based, as *The Wise Wound*, but it is rooted in the concrete experience of what this biological phenomenon is and how women experience it. Weideger's book is pioneering, taboo breaking (also taboo explaining) and wittily lucid. Using a truly feminist perspective and the available research material, including her own original work, she reconstructs not just the biology of women's cycles from menarche to menopause, but the anthropological and social meanings of the facts. This is a lot more than a medical text book: it is a political work. It arms us to deal with dismissive or ignorant medical professionalism, and more importantly with our own sheepish consciousnesses, ➤

which still make most of us hide our tampons and giggle over Hot Flushes. It is important for women to develop a sexuality which takes into account the whole of our gender-determined biological function. We may need a poetry and mythology of our own, but far more urgently we need a factual, sisterly account of what happens in secret to us all. Weidger offers us an excellent beginning to that account and *Female Cycles* is therefore a crucial work.

Sara Maitland

The Cage

by Andrea Newman

(Penguin 85p)

Andrea Newman wrote *The Cage* in 1964, wanting, as she says, "to reverse the classic corny old shotgun wedding story in which the boy is amusing himself sexually with a girl he doesn't love, and then is trapped by her pregnancy." In *The Cage*, recently republished by Penguin, it is the woman in the relationship who was only interested in the man for his body, and she whose life is shattered by unwanted pregnancy in the pre-abortion pre-women's liberation era. She marries him — what choice has she? — and, with an incredulous horror that is quite palpable in the deceptively simple prose, abandons her career ambitions and begins life as a housewife and mother. Her attempts alternately to escape from and adjust to her cage form the substance of the book.

Andrea Newman is not known as a feminist writer — and she would not want that label herself, although "I feel very much on your side, our side." But *The Cage* is interesting and important (and enjoyable) for feminists to read. It anticipates many of the women's movement's demands, criticising sex educators who tell girls that

their role is to control the urges of boys, while never warning or preparing girls for their own needs; describing the degradation of financial dependence in a once-equal relationship, and how this can lead to women employing such tactics as faking orgasms to keep their paymaster happy; and underlining the isolation of the woman who, like Valerie in the novel, determines to regain control of her own life: "It's hard to be strong all the time; I need someone to believe in me, to reassure me, someone I can talk to; because sometimes when I'm tired or depressed, the fear comes: suppose I never get away? And I don't know how to fight it alone..."

Maybe now she wouldn't have to. In parts, the novel reads as blessedly out-of-date. But according to the Family Planning Association, 35,000 brides were pregnant on their wedding day as recently as 1976. So it's not as far out of date as all that. Zoe Fairbairns

demnation, pointed and directed in curt lines, in derisive lists of phoney abstractions to be shot up and blown away. Best is the poem 'opiate', a most remarkable lashing analysis of the "happy little family" in relation to society.

Anger must have its let-ups. I find them in the gentler poems about her mother, with their clearer note of loss. And in thoughts about her two young sons: loving, hopeful, stern.

I scold her for beginning with a despondent little poem comparing her poetry to farts "ejected anyhow/into the wind" simply to survive! She says they are "freefalling". She should believe they'll land in the right places, and help to blow up patriarchal attitudes. Judith Kazantzis

KIDS' BOOKS

Cass the Brave

by Griselda Gifford

(Gollancz £2.95)

Bridge to Terabithia

by Katherine Paterson

(Gollancz £3.75)

Two new novels for older readers of 9-12 disappoint. *Cass the Brave* (Gifford is well known for *Jennie and the Sheep Thieves* and *Mirabelle's Secret*) is about a vicar's daughter who is convinced that an ancient curse will descend on her. A muddled tale about a muddled girl who does not live up to the promising title.

Bridge to Terabithia has a very non-sexist heroine in Leslie Burke, a middle-class city newcomer into a rural community, who can outrun all the boys in the school as well as outwit them intellectually and imaginatively. Leslie becomes quite indispensable to the emotional development of her hick neighbour Jess Aarons whose horizons are stretched to bursting point. This book won the Newbery Medal in the States but I give it my prize for the most class biased children's book of the last six months with its patronising portrait of a rural community and its absurdly flattering portrayal of a family of trendy intellectuals into sanded floors and 'thinking'.

Rosemary Stones
Children's Rights Workshop

Fighting Words

by Astra

(70p + 10p p&p, from

Onlywomen Press,

232 Mare St., London E8)

Here's poetry of controlled rage: with patriarchy and all its falsehoods. Astra has the laconic conversational elegance typical of modern American poets, but what she says with her conversation is a different matter.

Anyone who has been wrenched by mixed feelings for mother or for children, by disillusion with men and marriage, will know what fuels these poems. But few feminist poets generate Astra's power.

Her absolutes sometimes exasperate me: essentially, women as eternally, immutably victimised: on wives "so we must submit endlessly/wordlessly/helplessly/hopelessly". She seems to have little idea of affecting the stereotype, only of exposing it.

Yet anger is her own saving force: "it's had a healing effect on me/it's replaced fear/it's made me stronger" and this is the virtue of this book: its galeforce of con-

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ART

Phoenix Arising

Four feminist artists occupied the small space of the Holt Street Gallery in Birmingham's Arts Lab for three weeks. Sue Richardson, Monica Ross, Suzy Varty and Kate Walker displayed their



BERNARD MILLS

Exhibition in progress – one of the artists at work on a soft sculpture

work in progress, but not "finished". They "wanted to make the process open, with boxes for other women to write and draw in, and for us to learn from women's reactions to new work as we went along instead of presenting a finished object and then discovering it didn't communicate."

Every day for the first week the artists were in the gallery "with kids 'n' all, making this quadruple women's environment on the rough theme of women's lives." In the centre of the room was a black-walled, shed-sized box and the artists had worked outwards from this to the gallery walls. Domestic pictures were filtered through fine muslin from a projector in the box onto a screen made of old white clothes pinned to the wall. Outside the box several pairs of stuffed legs were lying around, and there was a large black and white mask series on another wall. Kate Walker's filing cards were waiting to be filled in by visitors with response to her questions on birth and marriage.

The work has not yet

extended very far. They intend to add to it as they take it elsewhere.

Joanna Klaces
Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool from
the end of January.

FILMS

Girl Friends

by Claudia Weill
(Warner Bros)

If you made a sequel to *Annie Hall* based on *Rubyfruit Jungle* you'd end up with something a bit like *Girl Friends*. Claudia Weill's story of Susan, a young Jewish New Yorker trying to make it as a photographer, is constantly spinning off and back to the real point of intensity: Susan's relationship with her close friend Anne, the flat-mate who gets married and leaves but paradoxically maintains that, "Susan, I didn't leave you – I got married, that's all..."

It's a well-produced and very witty film, with classic moments such as when Susan, hoping for a few philosophical minutes on the lavatory before leaving for work, is bawled out by Anne trying out her latest piece of sublime feminist poetry.

Claudia Weill, discussing the film, said: "I did everything possible to stop the characters becoming 'types'. The middle-class rabbi, who Susan has an affair with, isn't paternal; Ceil, a lesbian who wants to seduce her, isn't super-sophisticated; and Susan herself isn't an 'artist', although I chose photography as her potential career. She isn't meant to be special."

The highly-detailed realism she employs has some interesting consequences: it deflates the ponderousness and mystical awe which have characterised recent (male)

films about women (and their reviews; how about "women living their own strange, special lives, waiting for their men to come home"!). The emphasis on everyday life, on recognisable attitudes and so on, also guarantees the film an audience outside the command of most feminist films.

Claudia said she had "eighty-year-old ladies coming up to me after the film, saying 'my granddaughter's just like that'. Young kids come to see it – everybody comes... The feminist politics aren't made explicit, but they're there to be read in every gesture." The dialogue is wonderfully funny, full of throwaway lines, but as Claudia recognises, the important work is going on in the action itself, in meticulous visual descriptions and metaphors; shading, in classic realist fashion, the tones of dialogue, of relationships. There's a passage, for instance, where Anne demands of Susan – "You're not seeing an Older Man?" "We're only having lunch" Susan replies. "Is that all?" "Well, maybe a little dessert too." Because of how it's shot, it's actually quite a tense scene.

While Claudia Weill's strategies seem really to beat Hollywood at its own game (so much so that she's got a two-picture contract with Warner Brothers) I'd still want to raise a couple of perhaps rather abstruse points. One is that realism as a form has traditionally preoccupied itself with the will of the individual. (Free choice versus the quasi-tragic constraint of 'character' or, in some forms, social circumstance). While it's strategically correct to propagate the idea that we can 'choose' – to have homosexual affairs, to

have abortions, whatever – the realist position might fail to comprehend the levels at which social and sexual change actually occur; it's obviously much more complex, and at levels other than the individual. Also, 'ordinary' characters can easily be recuperated as anti-heroes. Melanie Mayron in *Girl Friends* is already being dubbed 'plump' (which she isn't) and 'warm hearted' (snore) by critics.

These cautions, though, are meant generally. *Girl Friends* is a very bold and imaginative step forward and is interesting to compare with the more 'serious' *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (Varda) and *The Two of Them* (Meszaro). And, thanks to the stranglehold that Ranks/Warners have on British distribution, this is one recommended film that ought to get shown outside London.

Sue Clayton

One Sings (reviewed SR 75) is showing at the Gate One Cinema in Notting Hill, London. *Girl Friends* is at the Gate Two, near Russell Square, London WC1.

Grease

by Randal Kleiser
(CIC)

Grease starts with waves breaking on the shore and ends with The Couple driving off into the sunset – but takes none of it seriously. It's all a publicity frolic – audiences know the stars, the songs, even the silly story, long before they enter the cinemas. 'You're the one that I want' had been top of the pops for longer than 'She Loves You' before the film was even released. Promotion cost far more than production (\$4 million to make versus \$5 million in pre-publicity in the US alone) and paid off in crowds of fans storming the cinema on the London first night. The film grossed \$115 million in America in its first three months, and the Empire Leicester Square took a record £50,000 worth of advance bookings.

With slick all-white *Grease*, Mr Entertainment Stigwood (he gave you the BGs, he gave you *Evita*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar*) moves on from *Saturday Night Fever* which, for all its sexism and classism, was dealing with 'issues' like unemployment, racial divisions, the longing to break free. It was loaded with meanings. But *Grease* is like a co-ed St Trinians – giggly overgrown highschool kids dancing and romping. The fifties nostalgia is a joke, a gimmick; the whole thing is shamelessly superficial. Once over the holiday romance



opening ("Don't spoil it" begs Olivia Newton-John as John Travolta's kiss increases in pressure – "I'm not spoiling it" he says, "I'm only making it better") and into the zappy cartoon credits, I really enjoyed myself. Okay, *Grease* is a heterosexual romance with good girls and bad girls and male bravado, but all that is sent up (except the heterosexuality of course – rule one in the dance competition is "All couples must be a boy and a girl"; "bad luck Eugene" the lads jeer at the form swot). The film is self-parodying, and only boring in rare moments of attempted intensity, like when Olivia in a long white nightie sings "Hopelessly Devoted to You" from her front porch. The digs at the boys – hugging in affection, then seeing they're being watched, punching each other and whipping out their combs to slick back the grease – might even raise a little doubt in a little male consciousness. But now who's being romantic! Jill Nicholls

Home Movie

A Comedy in Six

Unnatural Acts

Directed by Jan Oxenberg
(The Other Cinema)

A measure of the demand for lesbian feminist films was the excellent turnout for Jan Oxenberg's double-bill. Presented by Oxenberg herself, the evening was a joy.

Home Movie, her first film, is a short autobiographical statement illustrating the steadfast convictions of her lesbian past and present. She counterpoints her commentary visually through a mix of recent, explicit lesbian footage, intercut with some hilarious scenes from the family archives, notably disgruntled toddler Jan's problems playing at being the conventional 'Mom'.

Her sense of the absurd emerges again in the later, more stylised *Comedy*. Here Oxenberg uses film to parody not only a whole host of stereotyped visions of lesbian sexuality (*Six Unnatural Acts*), but also to explore and contrast as many different film styles. From the 'silent' paedophile, through the dyke gifted with a de Mille-esque parting of the seas, we're brought up to a 'verite' present with the director directed, juggling the all-seductive apples of non-monogamous lesbian love. Great. Helen MacKintosh

Contact The Other Cinema,
12 Little Newport St, London
WC2 (734 8508) for bookings
(A Comedy 25 mins; £14. Home
Movie 12 mins; £8).

Rapunzel

a film by Susan Shapiro, Esther Ronay and Francine Winham

Sue Clayton reviews the
British feminist feature which is
touring women's groups with its
makers.

"So what's *Rapunzel* about?

Sue: Women's sexuality.

Esther: No, it's about the relationship of mother and daughter – the terms in which it's set. It's not always posed directly in terms of sexuality, repressed or otherwise."

And this is what's so interesting. The film is visually very rich and allusive, and in a way saves its 'political' kick till the end, where the last *Rapunzel*, appropriately a rock musician (played by Laka Koc) presents in her song a kind of rhetorical perception of the distance produced ideologically between each generation of women:

"Mother your silence didn't help me
none

You were on my side – now we have
to take sides.

You say it's a silence of sympathy
I'm part of you

You scream when I'm born – you don't
scream for me now

Mother let down your hair and tell me
How did it feel" . . .

This 'rhymes' by contrast with the lyrical but somehow unintense prologue which echoes romantic stereotypes:

"Though each remembers little of it
and some remember nothing at all
resting in crazy houses
from the long spin of history
drinking the grief of their sex
eating it in bitter pills
muttering in kitchens
telling their daughters the story
of a sleeping princess;
but knowing it takes more than a man's
kiss
to wake one so bent on sleeping her life
away."

The film is structured around the *Rapunzel* fairy story, first told by a mother to her child, then retold visually in the most breathtaking evocative animation. The theme of the story (jealous witch/mother protects innocent girl from the advances of a knight-in-armour) then recurs in three mini-features, playing on and satirising faithful old cinematic forms: the prince's



view, a lavish detective-romance in the urban wastes; the mother's view, a psychodrama where the old opposition of career-woman vs innocent young love is most interestingly qualified – the 'career' being that of a family planning doctor and the daughter fearing pregnancy; and finally, the third telling, a sympathetic realism where *Rapunzel*'s 'desert' is bringing up her kids on a low wage. When she 'accidentally' meets Jam Today and they move into the gig, the final sequence of the film, there's a sense of familiar ground – the uncomplicated image of women-having-a-good-time. But it's qualified by the critical work done in previous episodes, and by the earlier graphics sections which do a lot to objectify the film's argument.

Rapunzel is part of the continuing saga of feminist films; it has to be said that, although this time they were funded with £24,000 from the British Film Institute (BFI), the film makers operated throughout with as palpable a commitment to the women's movement as in the early London Women's Film Group (LWFG) days when they were cadging £5 donations for campaign films. This is fascinating to someone like myself who for years believed in a simple equation between abject poverty and the credibility of the product as far as film making was concerned; not, of course, that £24,000 isn't laughably small for a colour feature if everyone was properly waged. But *Rapunzel* does mark a new point in feminist cultural practice.

The co-directors Sue, Esther and Francine, formerly of the LWFG, are quite sure that in the very early 1970s it would have been impossible to get a skilled crew of all women together. Low-budget films were to do with consciousness-raising at every stage; making documentaries about Fakenham, role-stereotyping and so on. and teaching each other skills while gaining confidence as a group. But after years of campaigning in the ACTT (film and TV union) and in film schools, there are

now women in the camera grades and other key jobs, and there are rather more possibilities for production in the industry.

An all-women production team obviously had a certain autonomy in relation to the BFI. Scripting and general ideas were talked through, not just with actors and crew members but with an informal 'committee' of women who were interested in steering the project the right way. What's really significant about the costing of this film though, was that it just allowed the group to take off into fiction. As Sue says "It was part of a longer development. *The Amazing Equal Pay Show** used burlesque, the conventions of the music hall; *Whose Choice** brought drama and documentary together in a way that made people question both; and *Rapunzel* goes further. It takes up the conventions of different well-established genres..."

The move to fiction from the more orthodox left/feminist 'real' testimonial or interview, though it causes some problems, nonetheless takes *Rapunzel* into a new field. It got a (fairly sympathetic and very long) review in *Cosmopolitan*. Although the film was inevitably criticised for its "sometimes crude propaganda", the reviewer had to admit it outclassed any of the multi-million-dollar 'women' movies (*Julia*, *An Unmarried Woman*, *Three Women*) in terms of "showing women they can be cowboys after all!"

Some conclusions:

1. It would be crazy to think that Hollywood forms of representation will crumble at once under the steely eye of feminists, and it's crucial to realise, as the film makers do, that to 'play' with stereotypes is always to some extent to repeat them, to be caught in their fascination.
2. For me, the decisive point about *Rapunzel Let Down Your Hair* is that it is a film about sexuality which doesn't overtly preoccupy itself with 'sex' (cf the overstated *Julia*).
3. There's now an international context for the work *Rapunzel* does (about ten European and American feminist features were screened at the Edinburgh Film Festival this year; and Agnes Varda and Claudia Weill's films can be seen in London now). I would, however, lament the disappearance of the ultra-cheap, black and white experimental and documentary end of the market; for although we're not now so romantic as we were about overworked and penniless collectives, such films are still a crucial part of feminist development. One hopes that all these areas of film production will be recognised in the new film finance legislation, and that they'll receive adequate state support, without being closeted up solely within a state distribution network.

The film (80 mins; £25) can be booked through the BFI, 81 Dean St, London W1 (01-437 4355). For further discussion see BFI Board Production catalogue 1977/78.
* LWF film distributed by The Other Cinema.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

NOT SO SWEET...

must pay the fare over. But there is often an unwritten understanding that the worker will in fact pay her own fare. As one agent said, "contracts are not worth the paper they are written on". Many women have to borrow money in the Philippines, at interest rates sometimes as high as 50%, or her employer advances her the fare. In either case she must repay it out of her wage. This can leave her with as little as 70 pence a week for herself, so quite a number do a second job on their day off.

At the moment some women are suing their employers for breach of contract over the fare. But many don't go to court either because agencies and employers threaten them with police action and deportation, or because they feel pressure from their own worried families who fear the loss of money coming home or that their daughters will be blacklisted here or in the Philippines.

There are also cases of outright extortion. In 1976 the company secretary of an agency in West Yorkshire met a group of Filipina women at Manchester Airport, brought them by bus to Leeds and there demanded sums of between 20 and 75 dollars from each of them before taking them to their families. Others were asked to bring expensive gifts to England for the agency. This agency feared they would not be able to get their 'extra payment' when a new employee's brother told them he planned to meet his sister on arrival. They phoned their contact in the Philippines who held up her papers and told the brother that under no circumstances was he to meet his sister at the airport or she would be prevented from coming over. Again, threats were used to try to keep the women quiet about these illegal payments. So there are many cases of abuses of the Employment Agencies Act. The difficulty lies in proving them, especially when there are dangers to the employees.

Agencies abroad are into the same racket. Some Spanish women have come over only to find their work permits entirely false. Others have found the addresses of employment were false. After complaints, the Spanish authorities seem to have clamped down on the agencies. In Columbia and Peru, travel agencies advertise that highly-paid jobs are easily found in the UK. They advance fares of £200 with high interest rates. When the women arrive as tourists, without work permits, only au pair work is legally open to them. Of course the £7-8

pocket money (less outside London) is insufficient to make repayments. They must then resort to working illegally in the hotel and catering industry or are forced into prostitution. In November last year a police swoop brought in 80 Columbian prostitutes in London.

the rochdale connection

The case of the Rochdale seamstresses illustrates several connections. In 1972 Alderglen Company was employing 126 Filipina women whose work permits were issued in bulk. It seems they had been led to believe that they would receive £40 a week; the reality was £13. As usual, unemployment benefit, graduated pension contributions, income tax, national health contributions had already been deducted; migrant workers are unlikely ever to benefit from the first two of these. Of the £13, one was deducted for an 'indemnity fund' set up to repay the sum advanced for the fare, agency fee etc, plus an interest rate of 8%. The women were also living in very overcrowded accommodation provided by the company.

Their case was taken up by the media and a local councillor, and conditions eventually improved. Interestingly, the US government made attempts to keep this councillor quiet, especially when his radio interviews revealing conditions in Britain were being heard in the Philippines through Australian broadcasting. This happened at a time when the US, after defeat in Vietnam, was busy setting up new dependent 'buffer' states in SE Asia and was anxious that President Marcos should receive no harmful publicity.

The two agents responsible for bringing over the Rochdale women are still in operation. There was no illegality committed by the British agent, who also brings in domestic workers. But there was plenty of speculation about the different kinds of work the women whom he brought over found themselves in, as well as cases of bad treatment and threats to women working for families here. His Filipino agent, Mr Villa-Nueva, still recruits women, has his papers processed without delay and has close links with the embassy here.

In 1973 the Filipino consul wrote to the *Sunday Times* that his government was "closely supervising" the operations of recruitment agencies. Indeed President Marcos had made it law in 1972 that all agencies should be licensed and must not charge more than 300p (£15). The chief of the OMS (Philippine Office of Manpower

Services, part of the Department of Labour), was sacked and there were some arrests, supposedly a general tightening up. But Mr Villa-Nueva is still operating, and a Runnymede Trust Report (1974) states that there were still many illegal agencies and that only eight out of the 108 registered agencies had complied with the new regulations by paying a fee and presenting documents.

surviving on soup and toast

The dangers and difficulties of migrant domestic work are very real. Apart from the long hours and low pay, the monotony of housework takes its toll, any possible satisfaction in looking after children is denied by the isolation and by the woman's lack of control over her work situation. There's often verbal abuse, racial prejudice and even assault from employers and agents. One Persian woman considered she was treated worse than the dog; the dog was at least given meat whereas she had to survive on soup and toast. She also wasn't allowed to use the washing machine, as "women from her country can't manage machines". If a domestic worker complains she is easily sacked. She is then likely to have nowhere to stay and thus have difficulties in claiming unemployment benefit. Many fear that a record of receiving benefit will give them a bad reputation in future dealings with the DoE and that this record may filter through to their home country. Without a job they may have to leave the country or may be deported.

Time off is not the relaxation it could be. Work is bearable because of the money they will be able to send home; leisure seems wasted. To save money the women must keep to an austere social life, and some even take on a second job. Many spend this time catching up on sleep, washing clothes, writing letters or if they can get the opportunity, cooking their own style of food with friends. The Filipinas are generally isolated — language and culture can be barriers. And often the women can meet only in the local church or convent. One woman spent her entire week off in her bedroom. Others were kicked out of the house when their employers went away for the weekend. Not surprisingly, some succumb to the stress and unhappiness of their situation with near nervous breakdowns or even attempted suicide. A young, highly qualified Filipina domestic worker did kill herself in 1976. A migrant who has to go into a mental hospital is immediately liable for deportation.

where are the unions?

Domestic workers from abroad are covered by the Employment Protection Act, though many of them are ignorant of its provision. The trouble is that it seems designed to protect people already in a trade union, so it is of little use to a household worker who has no union and is not even covered by a Wage Council. General unions, such as the TGWU and GMWU could take up individual cases, and could possibly secure better hours and pay by comparing a domestic worker's situation with that of a residential council worker. So far this has not happened, partly because unions are structured to organise collectively at work. Again, migrants both in private households and in the hotel and catering industry are often afraid of the consequences of strike action. And sometimes those in hotels and restaurants who have joined unions have not had full union support. There has been a recent increase in militancy in the service industry: the Metropole (see SR 67) and Garners Steakhouses strikes. In the first one the conflict with the union was over their pay claim which broke the 10% limit. The fact that migrants will settle for lower wages and are therefore easily exploited has led to the ambivalent and even hostile attitudes of unions to them. If the unions fought for the right of migrant workers to settle in the country, bring over their families and get involved in political activity, then the real reasons for the cuts and unemployment could be brought out. But this would bring the unions into conflict with the state....

In 1973, after an approach by Portuguese and Spanish workers in London, the International branch of the TGWU was set up which increased membership of migrant workers. But more recently the TUC asked for the banning of workers without permits. And this again engendered insecurity.

In the past, there have been ethnic unions, such as Jewish unions around 1900, which later merged with local unions. There are similar groups today: the Indian Workers Association and Italian Workers Organisations for instance. When a group of Filipina women got together as an independent group in London, they stayed together only a short time, partly because of lack of money and time, and partly because of the divisive role played by the embassy which tried to encourage women away from the group to join a purely social organisation. Recently, a new organisation of Filipinos has been set

up. It helps individuals with housing problems, legal advice, liaises with government departments over permit difficulties and organises social activities.

Groups working with migrants and groups of migrants of different nationalities have put forward the following demands:

1. Reform or abolition of the work permit system. Work permits should be applied for by the worker her/himself and s/he should be able to change and choose jobs freely.
2. Amnesty for all those here illegally.
3. Extension of trade union activity organisation among migrants — improving pay and conditions.
4. Access to public authority housing, benefits, tax allowances, health and social services on the same basis as the rest of the population. The protection (a longer period of notice) afforded to hotel workers who 'live in' to be extended to au pairs and domestic workers. Or payment of a full wage from which they pay the employer for board and lodging.
5. The right to vote in elections.
6. Shortening of the working day for all.

Although all these demands affect female migrant workers, nowhere is the particular situation of women emphasised. Only when the woman migrant starts to ask herself why she is flung into the most insecure and isolated work — the type of work which women traditionally do unpaid, why some women can afford to pay someone else to do that work, and when they start organising collectively, can the time spent in an industrial country hold positive possibilities for her, both here and on her return home. The same applies to all the British working class girls who go to Europe or the south of England to work as au pairs and household workers. All this shows the need for the women's liberation movement to support the attempts of migrant women to organise, and to refer to migrant domestic workers in its demands for a recognition of housework as work, and for improved childcare facilities.■

- * LUCS survey (statistics) Dec '77 commissioned by the International Youth Welfare Committee.
- * Runnymede Trust Report on Rochdale '74.
- * Fabian Trust, Britain's Migrant Workers.
- * Contemporary Archive on Latin America, Fact Sheet.
- * Race and Class '77.
- * IDOC Bulletin No. 9.
- * Berger and Mohr, The Seventh Man.
- * A. Wilson's article in CARF No 6.

Some useful addresses

Migrant Action Group, c/o 68 Chalton St, London NW1 (01-388 0241).
Philippino Chaplaincy, Donal O'Hanlon (01-834 8227).
Au Pairs International Club (social), Bramley Rd, London N14.

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THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS

Send a letter of complaint about sexist material to: The Mother or Father of the NUJ Chapel at the publication concerned, with a copy to the editor, and to the Equality Working Party, NUJ, Acorn House, 314 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1.

Farewell EGA – it's time you were shut

AMID all the hoo-ha, hula-baloo and kerfuffle over the closure of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital, is there room for one still small voice of dissent? I say the place would be far better shut and forgotten, and the sooner done the better.

Whatever may once have been the justification for building a shy little enclave of feminist conservation, changing times have swept away all that sort of sham modesty. Like the prostitute who allegedly attended their gynaecological clinic saying that she was too modest to be examined by a man!

Or will the supporters of the hospital please say how many kidney patients they will have die elsewhere so that the hems of their trailing skirts will not be touched by a male hand?

None of this, of course applies to the EGA, as I said, although there was a time, many years ago, when it was said by some doctors to provide a haven for the occasional incompetent female practitioner who would not have been appointed elsewhere.

The EGA came in with the crinoline. Let it go out with the burnt bra.

From Pulse, a weekly newspaper for GPs, July 24.
(Morgan Grampian House, Calderwood St, London SE 18).
Sent in by Sally Goldsmith.

Why, though, should such a small place generate so much emotion? Not, I think, because of the cult of 'feminism'. The inverted commas are deliberate because all "feminists" that I have met have been the most masculine females around, outside of the Russian shot putters.

Already there are threats of sit-ins and obstructive tactics. The inevitable emotional appeals have been launched, obviously far too late to do any material good.



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From Weekly Herald, 25 August. Sent in by Claire Glasman, London N14.

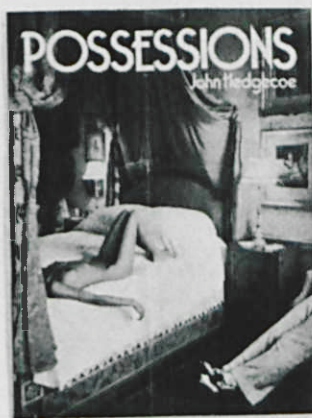
Talking of battered wives, I wonder if providing refuge is the most economical way of helping them.

There must be a reason why they are battered and I have no doubt that some are married to drunkards or sadists.

But could it be that a majority jolly well ask for it and that even these represent

a minority of those who do ask for it?

Wouldn't it be cheaper and more effective to provide a refuge for nagged husbands, including those who haven't reached the battering stage and those who never will, and leave the wives at home with nobody to nag except their children and neighbours?



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Book published by Mitchell Beazley, 14-15 Manette St, London W1 – or ring 01-434 1694.
Sent in by Tower Hamlets Arts Project Collective, Ann Day from Collet's Bookshop, Moira from Publications Distribution Co-op.

From Doctor, another weekly newspaper for GPs, July 27.
(8 North St., Guilford, Surrey). Sent in by Tom Heller, Sheffield.

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SUSAN DRAY

Solon and the Athenian Brothels

*Now we have courtesans for the sake of pleasure,
but concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation
and wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and of having
a faithful guardian of all our household affairs.* Demosthenes

Prostitution has a herstory; one that has often been distorted, re-written or simply ignored. Historians have examined prostitution either as a nefarious evil perpetuated by evil women, or as a healthy outlet for healthy males. It is assumed to have always existed, to have always been the "necessary evil".

Mercenary prostitution — the selling of a woman's body — was first institutionalized in ancient Athens in approximately 594 B.C. as a government-run enterprise to finance the building of the Greek military. Previously, prostitution operated under the guise of hospitality — giving a wife or daughter to a house guest — sexploitation of slaves, forced marriages and 'religious' services to Aphrodite.

The first Athenian brothel was staffed by Asian slaves, prisoners of war and women cast out by their families who were kidnapped or bought from slave traders — historians call it "recruited" — then "educated in erotic cajolery". They were sent to Athens, harbour settlements, or Corinth, a city based on trade and prostitution for the sailors and merchants. None of the slaves (called deikteriades by historians of prostitution) were allowed on the street during the day, and they could not attend religious ceremonies or enter temples; all were forced to wear a special multi-coloured garment invented by Solon the Athenian law-giver, and dye their hair with saffron to "attract attention of the guardians of the law".¹ They could not legally refuse a customer. The deikteriades lost the few rights they might have had as citizens; their children were absolved from the duty to support them, and male children were not given citizenship until they performed an unspecified act of bravery, could not inherit, associate with other youths or address an assembly.

The brothel was operated by a government-licensed pornobosceion who lost all rights as a citizen but gained a

very lucrative business. Many registered the brothels under assumed names. The proceeds from the very small entrance/sexual fee went to the government through a series of tax collectors who were notoriously corrupt and wealthy; while the customers were expected to give each woman a present before each trick, she seldom amassed any savings and could rarely buy her freedom; she was considered the lowest member of society.

The door of the brothel was always open, but business did not begin until after 4pm "so as not to keep young men away from their exercises".² Meanwhile, the women sat on benches playing games or lounging along the walls, dressed in diaphanous scarves and thick make-up. A man entering the brothel was safe from police, creditors and his wife but the deikteriades were virtual prisoners.

The business was incredibly profitable for the state, financing the ships and guns of the government, and to ensure steady revenues each woman in the brothel was forced to obtain a formal licence to leave the city and had to offer "acceptable guarantees" of her return. Sea trade also contributed to the rise of the brothels. It was becoming increasingly important and the growing numbers of sailors away from wives, too poor to support concubines and separated from young boy 'favourites' demanded sexual satisfaction. The temples of Venus (Aphrodite) and the state-owned brothels were situated in ports and near gambling districts to service them.

The brothels also served direct political ends. Concubines had long been a sign of wealth; a man's status depended in part on how many women he could support in his home or donate to the gods in return for luck on the battlefield or in game. The price of a deikteriade was extremely low and the law establishing the brothels was part of a group of statutes limiting displays of wealth. The brothels were provided as an alternative to keeping courtesans: "be content to embrace



Limited freedom: hetaerae and flute-girls entertain at a dinner party. (The Greek word for dining-room also meant "men's room".) Other Athenian women spent their lives in absolute confinement, whether as brothel-slaves or as the wives of respectable men.

the women in the brothels and not to spend the inheritance of your children on vanities" advised Athenaeus. Go to brothels where "you may buy pleasure at a moderate cost".

Most importantly, though, it was to directly service the patriarchy by strengthening the patrimony and the nuclear family that Solon started the brothels. The majority of Solonian legislation dealt with the family, outlining inheritance rights, adoption and the question of women. The brothels were started to strengthen monogamy by providing all men — not just men of wealth — with sexual gratification on demand, free from the fear of creating heirs, or worse still, daughters. Simultaneously, adultery by women was severely punished; the laws against adultery were stronger than those against rape because while a raped woman may conceive an illegitimate heir to her husband's or father's wealth, she hates the rapist and retains her loyalty to the clan; the adulteress, on the other hand, had presumably transferred her loyalty from her husband's to her lover's clan. The rapist was forced to pay a fine but the male lover faced death at the husband's hands.

Brothels further served the patriarchy by dividing women — dividing them into castes in the eyes of men, and separating them from each other.

"A fully realized female tends to engender anxiety in the insecure male. Unable to cope with a multiplicity of powers united in one female, men from antiquity to the present have envisioned women in 'either-or' roles."³

Women were separated geographically, living in separate parts of the city, prohibited from attending the same religious ceremonies, barred from visiting each other or even walking on the streets. The differences in dress made obvious the distinctions between castes of women. The church fathers would later add concepts of guilt, shame and sin to the male-serving morality but the divisiveness caused by sexism existed in ancient Athens.

Perhaps the brothels also combatted any challenge offered by homosexuality to the patriarchy and the military hierarchy. Homosexuality and lesbianism were tolerated, encouraged in many ways, but were dealt with sharply when men and women rejected the nuclear family or gave their loyalty to their lovers rather than the military authorities. Greece was a warring country; it required the production of soldiers and for those soldiers to be isolated from each other, responsive only to the power structure.

Lujo Basserman, in his history of prostitution, contends that the suppression of homosexuality and the rise of the brothel were "especially important in preserving the solidarity of many military units and indeed the warlike spirit of whole nations". The brothels were offered as the alternative to homosexuality for soldiers and sailors denied the opportunity to make liaisons with their peers. The only other possibilities would be rape or adultery — both considered assaults on other men's 'property'.

Solon was heralded as "the saviour of the state" for setting up the brothels. He was praised by his contemporaries as a "benefactor", a man who "averted great mischief and inevitable disorder". His innovation proved so successful that the profession splintered into three distinct groups; the deikteriades, auletrides (musicians and dancers) and the hetaerae, recognized for their intelligence and wit.

The auletrides played the flute, zither or drums at banquets and festive occasions clad in flimsy garments. They were also accomplished dancers, tumblers and gymnasts and their performances were such important parts of any festivity that men competed to hire the most talented, best-known artists. The women were usually slaves brought to Athens from Asia and were auctioned off for sex to the male guests after their performance. While sometimes they were free to choose their customers, mass rape and beatings occurred if they refused the drunken guests. Basserman relates an incident when: ►

"enraged revellers, disappointed in their expectations, fell upon the flute-players with their fists, tore the costly and flimsy robes from their bodies and smashed their instruments."

In spite of this, auletrides had more independence than the brothel slaves; they lived where they chose, were better paid and were free to have long affairs if they wished. While the deikteriades were hated by everyone except, perhaps, some of their sister prostitutes, the auletrides were very popular.

The Athenian women with the most exalted position and the most freedom were in the third group of prostitutes — the hetaerae. They were intelligent, witty, articulate and educated, the only women in Athenian society allowed to manage their own financial affairs, stroll through the streets anywhere at anytime.

They were free to attend the plays, ceremonies and speeches, to speak with whomever whenever they pleased, to share the intellectual activities of Greece. They could take the sexual or romantic initiative with men, frequently were 'faithful' to one lover for months or years. As the auletrides were talented musicians, the hetaerae were accomplished conversationalists, the intellectual equals of the men they entertained. They were herbalists and midwives, the mothers and lovers of kings, statesmen, artists and poets. The famous Aspasia was a philosopher with a following and a classroom of her own:

"In the life of almost every important personality prominent in the history of Hellenism, the influence of well-known hetaerae can be proved . . . Portrait statues of such women were set up in the temples and other public buildings by the side of meritorious generals and statesmen." (Henriques, *Prostitution and Society: A Survey*.)

They demanded enough money for their sexual services to keep themselves and the prostitutes in their homes ostentatiously, erect monuments to the gods and their native cities.

The freedom of the hetaerae contrasted sharply with the seclusion of Greek matrons. The domestic lives of Athenian women were dismal. The Greek word for woman literally meant "bearer of children"; the state was interested in young warriors and the husband in heirs so that many female infants were exposed with weak and deformed babies in clay vessels on the side of Mt. Taygetus, where they were left to be claimed by others or die. An Athenian girl was taught only weaving, sewing and cooking. If found to be 'unchaste', her father or brother could sell her to a brothel and if found to be sterile, her husband could give her to a friend. The home she kept was dark, damp and unhealthy; a middle or upper class woman lived in the interior of the house and, according to some historians, was only allowed out for religious and funeral ceremonies. When her husband died she returned to her father's house while all her husband's property went to the male relatives. She remained a minor her entire life while her guardianship passed from father to husband to son. The tortoise was the symbol of the Athenian woman's life, caught in a society that believed, according to Plutarch in *Isis and Osiris*, that "unmarried girls in particular need to be guarded, and housekeeping and silence befit married women".

Unlike the wife, the prostitute's freedom is directly related to the distance she can put between herself and domestication. As Simone de Beauvoir finds in *The Second Sex*:

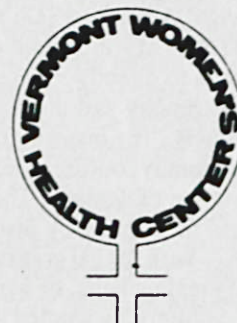
"Since the oppression of women has its cause in the will to perpetuate the family and to keep the patrimony intact, woman escapes complete dependency to the

degree in which she escapes from the family . . . By virtue of the fact that they (hetaerae) escaped from the family and lived on the fringes of society, they escaped also from man; they could therefore seem to him to be fellow beings, almost equals. In Aspasia, in Phryne, in *Lais* was made manifest the superiority of the free woman over the respectable mother of a family."

The popularity and status of the prostitute, her freedom from harassment, indeed her life down to the price she charges, is dependent upon the position of the wife, the society's attitude towards chastity, adultery, virginity and bi-sexuality. As in all other facets of her life, a woman's sexuality is tied to that of her sisters and dictated in large part by men. Prostitutes are not, as some claim, the group being sacrificed for the 'purity' and 'chastity' of 'virtuous women'; their position does not change inversely — but directly — with that of married women. When men oppress women in the family by insisting on chastity and monogamy, severely punishing adultery, men increasingly oppress another group of women by treating them as bodies for hire. In ancient Athens, thousands of women were literally made slaves to men's sexual demands, while thousands of others were made semi-slaves to men's demand for an unchallenged patrimony.

Wendy Wells

- 1 *Basserman, Lujo, The Oldest Profession: A History of Prostitution, Arthur Barker Ltd, London.*
- 2 *Licht, Hans, Sexual Life in Ancient Greece, George Routledge and Sons Ltd, 1932.*
- 3 *Pomeroy, Sarah B., Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves, Robert Hale and Co., London, 1975.*



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